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The Fighting Peacock, the Elephant, the Dragon:

Burmese democratization process between India and China

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"*Follow the Buddha*
but fear the Natts"

- Burmese proverb -

CONTENTS

Disclaimer

The use of both the toponyms “Burma” and “Myanmar” in the following work is not used to mean any ethnic, linguistic or political position by the author with respect to the country, its people and its actual government. The two words are used as synonyms, representing the same geo-political entity, which used to be known, in English, as Burma and whose official name is since 1989 “Republic of the Union of Myanmar”.

Introduction

The thesis deals with the democratization process taking place in Burma/Myanmar with particular reference to the influence which India and China have been exercising on it;
The aim of the work is to assess in which way and to what extent Beijing and Delhi have contributed to the progress or the delay of such a process, by impeding or backing the military government in power till date.
Myanmar –connection among the Indian subcontinent, Indochina and East Asia– has always suffered of an "encirclement complex" due to its peculiar geographical location, which "sandwiches" it between the three historical Asian giants: India, Thailand and China. In modern times, especially India and China – today's major emerging economies– have played a fundamental role in Burmese affairs; this happened also with regard to the recent political evolution of the country, which has been governed by a military junta since 1962.
Thus, Myanmar became one of the main "battle-grounds" of the competition between the Chinese "Dragon" and the Indian "Elephant".
Being Burmese history and political scenario relatively unknown and extremely complex, a broad introduction in this regard seemed necessary and inevitable, in order to offer a more comprehensive framework for the analysis. Thus, *Chapter I*, after providing a general location of the country, exposes two Burmese peculiarities which are extremely relevant from a political point of view: the national ethnic variety and the strong Buddhist belief of Theravada tradition. Multiethnicity –root of a long civil war still far from being over– and Burmese Buddhism are two elements which have strongly influenced the political development of the country and that, as a consequence, have also played a role –directly or indirectly– in the Indo-Burmese and Sino-Burmese relations.
Chapter II focuses on the reconstruction of recent political history of Myanmar, starting from the period just before the independence to latest events.
Chapter III opens the dissertation on the core topic, discussing the following question: how has China contributed to the recent political evolution of Myanmar? The communal authoritarian characterization of Myanmar and the People's Republic of China government would suggest a simple answer: Chinese Communist regime gave support to Burmese military rule. Such an

intuition would not be wrong, but extremely superficial; in fact history and actual events show that the relation between the two states has been much more complex and that Beijing has faced numerous obstacles while attempting to expand its influence over Myanmar; because of this, moreover, such an influence has not been as effective as Beijing wished it to be. Therefore, new questions need to be inquired: to which extent Beijing supported the *Tatmadaw* (the Burmese Army) and for which reasons? What is the relation between the *Tatmadaw* and the Chinese regime and how did it influence the development of the correspondent foreign policies? Was Chinese influence on the democratization process decisive?

The analysis suggests that the support China used to give to the Burmese generals is not to be taken for granted in the future, and that there is a certain possibility that Beijing may decide to revise its Burma policy in order to better pursue its goals in the country.

Chapter IV deals with the same primary queries raised in *Chapter III*, but with regard to India.

Also in this instance, the diverse ideological background characterizing the two states could suggest an immediate impression; India and Myanmar adopted forms of government which deeply differ from each other and this could easily bring to conclude that Delhi has plausibly attempted to impede the perpetuation of the military rule and to support a democratic development for Burma.

Anyways, in this case also, such an intuition reveals to be correct but incomplete: though India, different from China, have explicitly condemned the Burmese junta and backed the democratic front in first stance, however in the 1990s it has drastically changed the orientation of its Burma policy; Delhi has consequently sought a collaboration with the same undemocratic government it had contributed to ostracize earlier.

A deeper analysis of Indian position –with reference both to the democratic phase and to the actual one– demonstrates its overall inefficiency. In addition to this, India's support to Burmese democratization, when framed within the wider pro-democracy activity practiced by Delhi in the region, shows that Indian approach to democracy promotion is extremely "realist", i.e. not inspired by a sincere interest in the advancement of democracy *per se*, but by precise strategic interests that, if not fulfilled , can easily change its stance.

The *Conclusions* will formulate an overall evaluation about Chinese and Indian influence on Burmese democratization process; based on that, a forecast will be drawn, assessing how the eventual success/failure of such a process could affect the regional geopolitical balance, and *vice versa*.

Chapter I

"The golden land"

I.1. Locating the country

Myanmar, having been shut away for more than a quarter of a century, is a country little known to the rest of the world, despite its important past and its rich cultural heritage, whose most popular icon is a host of golden *stupa* which in the far 13th century led Marco Polo to dub it as "the golden land" .

The county is located in the macro-area known as Southeast Asia and it extends from the Andaman Sea in the South to the Eastern Himalayan mountain range, and it is bounded by India in the Northwest, Bangladesh and the Bay of Bengal in the West, the Andaman Sea in the South, China in the North and Northeast, and Laos and Thailand in the East.

Apart from a 1,930 km coastline long, Myanmar is surrounded by a horseshoe-shaped ring of mountains that form a natural border of 5,876 km with its neighbours. This same ring roughly divides the majority ethnic group, the Burmans/Bama, who mainly live in the central valleys, from the greatest number of the other minorities who primarily inhabit the highlands, being known because of this as "hill people".

Being that Burmese civilizations is historically based on wet-rice cultivation, its hydrography is particularly relevant: the main rivers are the Irrawaddy/Ayeyarwady, Chindwin, Thanlwin, and Sittaung.

The country covers 676,578 square km and consists of the seven states of Rakhine, Chin, Kachin, Kayin (or Karen), Kayah, Shan, and Mon. Myanmar can be roughly divided into four regions: the northern and western mountainous regions, the Eastern Shan plateau, the central belt, and the long southern "tail". The region North of Mandalay is commonly called Upper Myanmar, while Yangon and the Irrawaddy delta are known as Lower Myanmar.

The Irrawaddy delta in the South, where the river divides into eight main branches before flowing into the Andaman Sea, is known as Myanmar's "rice bowl" since the 60-70% of rice production comes from this area, which is also famous for its fishing industry.

Image 1. “Map of Myanmar” (source: www.nationsonline.org)

The delta region is densely populated, but in May 2008 it was destroyed by Cyclone Nargis, which killed more than 84,500 people, with 53,800 missing, and rendered about 2.4 million homeless, mostly in the Southwest delta region[1].

[1] S. Myat Yin, J. Elias, *Cultures of the world. Myanmar*, New York, Marshall Cavendish Benchmark, 2012, p. 13.

Many toponyms were Anglicized by the British when they occupied the country in the 19th century, but the present government, as aforesaid, has restored through a controversial law the supposed Myanmarese names of most of the towns and cities. The most famous city of the country is undoubtedly Yangon, previously Rangoon, symbolized by the superb Shwedagon Pagoda. Founded in 1755 by King Alaungpaya it was made the capital city of Burma under the British rule in 1886 and remained such, even after the independence until 2007, when Naypyidaw (lit. "Abode of Kings") was officially proclaimed the new capital of the country. Some saw in this inexplicable decision one of the acts through which the military government expresses its intention of gaining consensus and legitimisation by emulating the ancient Burmese kings[2]. The process started in 2005 with the mass relocation of government ministries from Rangoon to 240 km North, to a site yet to be developed; before the place was officially renamed with its new royal name, Naypyidaw. The television broadcast pictures of troops parading and three big statues of the ancient kings Anawrahta, Bayintnaung and Alaugphaya. Therefore, the building of this new city, which still is under construction, seems to be Than Shwe government's attempt to honour the tradition and claim of royal legacy[3].

Other main cities are Mandalay, Myanmar's second-largest city and main cultural centre lying on the eastern bank of the Irrawaddy river, Mawlamyine and Pathein/Bassein.

Myanmar is a country which is rich in natural resources and used to be one of the most developed in Asia; though, because of authoritarian government controls and unsuccessful economic policies it nowadays still lives a situation of rural poverty and political instability. Myanmar is a place of fascinating complexity from any point of view: its weather and nature extend from the tropical to the Himalayan one, its history is the succession of different civilizations and its culture is a very unique mix of Buddhist ethics enriched with elements of Hinduism, with other faiths also existing in the country.

Though it is not possible to indulge in a wider description of Burmese geography, society and culture, since this is not germane to the intent of this work, there are two main aspects which cannot be neglected to properly introduce our politics-centred analysis: ethnicity and religion.

The complex ethnic composition of the Myanmar people and the importance of religion – Theravada Buddhism for the greatest majority of the citizenship- as a connotative element of their life has historically influenced the politics of the country and so do still today.

[2] S. McCarthy, *The Politics of Piety: Pageantry and the Struggle for Buddhism in Burma*, in "Working Paper Series" (Southeast Asia Research Centre, City University of Hong Kong), 2007, No.85, p. 25.
[3] Ibidem.

I.2. Ethnicity

I.2.1. Definition of ethnicity in Myanmar

Burmese ethnic scene is extremely heterogeneous and the country is well known for its racial and linguistic variety. This is an obvious feature for a crossroad territory which served for centuries as a buffer state between different civilizations, in particular the three giants of South, Southeast and East Asia: India, China and Thailand. It is not easy to get a precise estimation of the population of the different groups anyways: lots of data proceed from governmental sources which are not impartial and nowadays there is no allowance for international organizations -especially those working in the field of protection of minorities and human rights- to enter the country and make new field-based reports. Moreover, apart from this political-logistic inconvenience, a proper estimation is made hard by the ambiguity that the concept of ethnicity acquires in Burma. What is an ethnicity and according to which criteria should it be identified and quantified?

Just like in China, this is the situation of a multi-ethnic country with a strong majority -the Burmans/Bama(r)- who benefits of a greater control over the state and its politics and tried over time to deal with the minority problem with specific policies, whose ability of guaranteeing minorities turned out doubtful in the end.

In the list of the 135 ethnicities officially recognized by the government as such, in fact, some groups had no place, firstly. Secondly, among all these groups some are far more consistent then others, but the reason of the identification is not clear. Usually the main ethnicities, apart from the Bama, are considered to be the Kachin, the Karenni/Kayah, the Kayin/Karen, the Chin, the Mon, the Rakhine and the Shan. This estimation is however based on the names of those who were able to negotiate with the Bama-ruled government separate states/territorial boundaries[4]. After the independence from the British, who first unified the actual Burmese territory by merging it to India, these groups –who until that moment, except for the colonial rule, were never subdued to a central power from Rangoon– were persuaded under some guarantees to join the new state. In these way ethnic territorial entities, like the Shan State or the Karen territories, were born. Identifying the major groups by considering the "ethnic states" inside Myanmar is not correct under some points of views, since none of them is ethnically homogeneous[5].

[4] C. Ekeh, M. Smith, *Minorities in Burma*, London, Minority Rights Group International, 2007, URL: http://www.minorityrights.org/3546/briefing-papers/minorities-in-burma.html.
[5] Ibidem.

The estimation of the same majority Burman population is also controversial: they are considered to be around 30 millions, i.e. two third of the total but this measures are based on the primary usage of

Burmese language, though not all the speakers have the same racial belonging[6]. Social mobility and intermarriages contributed to make the racial puzzle more complex[7].

Another criterion which has been used to categorize ethnic Burma is a socio-economic hierarchy based on the progress reached by each people in terms of productive activity, social structure and religion. Fistié, writing in 1985, made a difference in this sense between two main groups[8]: the first one, including the Burman majority, the Mons and the Shan, was characterized by the rice cultivation as their main economic activity, some advanced forms of state organization and the belief in Buddhism.

The second group included all the other "hill people"–except the Chinese and the Indians who, as recent immigrants, were considered to have features apart– practicing a subsistence economy (based on hunting/ gathering/ fishing/ opium cultivation or even trafficking in people) and/or tribalism as societal rule and/or less "developed" worships like animism.

Another alternative, quoted and used by the same Fistié and mainstream among ethnologues, is to classify the groups according to their language, qualifying them as linguistic-families: Sino-Tibetan, Hmong/Mien, Thai/Kadai, Austronesian, Austroasiatic, and Indoeuropean. According to other classification the linguistic groups of Burma are: Sinic, Tibeto-Buran, Malayo-Polinesian, Miao-Yao, Mon-Khmer, Tai[9].

Explaining and quantifying "ethnicity" in Myanmar is therefore particularly hard.

Not only in terms of content but also in its denomination. Also the usage of ethnicity-related words is controversial: words who can be politically sensitive seem to imply a specific political recognition to the user[10]; on the other hand there are particular names like "tribe" which sound incredibly offensive to those like Kachin and Karen who have nationality aspirations[11], or others, like "nationalities" itself, which hurt those like the Chinese and the Indian, who feel excluded by

[6] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *Ethnic Groups in Burma. Development, Democracy and Human Rights*, in "ASI's Human Rights Series", 1994, No. 8, London, Anti Slavery International, p. 35.
[7] Ibidem.
[8] P. Fistié, *La Birmanie ou la quê de l'unité. Le problème dela cohésion nationale dans la Birmanie contemporaine et sa perspective historique*, Paris, École Française d'Etrême-Orient, 1985, p. 1.
[9] D. I. Steinberg, *Burma. The State of Myanmar*, Washington D.C., Georgetown University Press, 2001, pp. 192-193 (Appendix A – Linguistic Groups of Burma/Myanmar).
[10] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 36.
[11] Ibidem.

their being not-autochthon newcomers and who are usually not even included in the number of the non-Burman ethnicities[12].

I.2.2. Main minority ethnicities

Kachin

The Kachin are between 1 and 1.5 million people, mainly settled in the Kachin State, in the Northeast of the country, but present also elsewhere, in particular inside the Shan State, where they mixed with the Shan and the Burmans[13].

The notion of Kachin is particularly controversial an can acquire two different meanings. On one hand according to an ethno-linguistic and cultural concept, they are people belonging to the Kachin and Jinghpaw/Singpo/Jingphosu group who live basically inside the actual Kachin state and are divided in a number of sub-groups according to their dialect: proper Jinghpaw, Gauri, Tsasen, Duleng, Hkaku, Htingai. On the other hand, ethnologists often prefer a more general cultural definition according to which Kachins are all the non-Buddhist population practicing slash and burn farming and living in the so called "region of the Kachin Hills", including the Kachin state and part of the Northern Shan states[14]. Though they initially resisted to the British conquest, following the arrival of missionaries many converted to Christianity and together with Karen and Chin constituted the mainstay of the British Burma army[15]. Obviously their religious identity caused problems when in 1961 U Nu tried to impose Buddhism as Burma's official state religion[16] and, being more than two thirds of them Christian, many denounce the violence perpetrated by the government against them because of their belief still today.

The Kachin nationalist movement created a strong political identity among the various above mentioned sub-groups, linked among each other by a dynamic clan system. In contrast, Kachin subgroups living in India and China have never associated with the goal of independence pursued by the nationalist movement in Burma[17].

Participating actively to the anti-Japanese resistance during the Second World War, the nationalist cause grew during the war years and the Kachin State (89,042 km2) was created under the 1947 constitution. After U Nu's decree establishing Buddhism as Burma's official state religion, in 1961 the Kachin Independence Organisation (KIO) was formed to demand the

[12] Ibidem.
[13] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, p. 12.
[14] Ibidem.
[15] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, pp. 38-39.
[16] S. Gil, *The Role of Monkhood in Contemporary Myanmar Society*, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Publications, 2008, p. 7.
[17] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 38.

secession of the Kachin State. After Ne Win's coup the rebellion spread out more and KIO became a strong rebel army.

Following the SLORC takeover the KIO became a founding member of the Democratic Alliance of Burma. In 1989, when the SLORC agreed cease-fires with ethnic armies from the CPB in Northeast Burma, including the New Democratic Army (NDA) in the East of Kachin State. These moves were followed by the SLORC's growing rapprochement with China, which had previously been quietly sympathetic to the KIO cause. With thousands of troops following the cease-fires, the SLORC was able to launch a series of massive military operations against the KIO in both the Shan and Kachin States, probably considering the KIO as Burma's best organised insurgent group to be neutralized. Violence perpetrated by the government forces included forced relocation, forced evacuation of villages and expropriations, construction of new Buddhist monuments and apparent encouragement of immigration –a demographic counterattack- in traditional Kachin territories by other ethnicities, especially the Chinese.

The Kachin, though possessing a soil rich in gold and jade, got poorer and poorer. The SLORC having planned a number of projects in the area, some assisted by China, they fear this will bring exploitation and not benefit to the people and feel squeezed by the three big powers at the border. In 1994, looking for a peaceful solution, talks were opened with Rangoon.

Chin

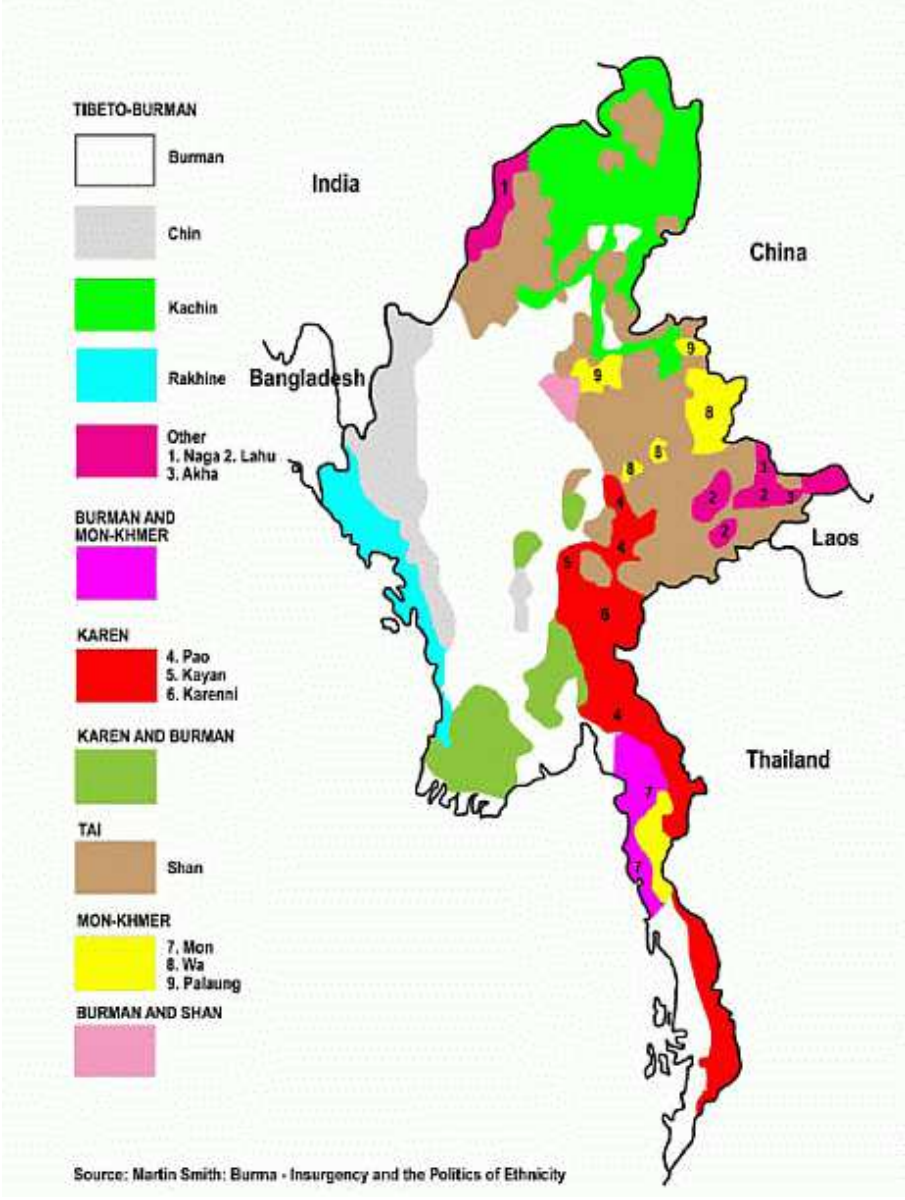
The Chin are a Burmese hill-people of Tibeto-Burmese language who inhabit the mountain chain linking western Burma with the Northeastern Indian state of Mizoram, where they are known with the name of Mizo. They have strong links with another Indo-Burmese minority which in Burma is named with the name of Kathe/ Meithei/ Ponna or Manipuri, the great majority of them being native of the Indian state of Manipur[18]. Of these Manipuri those who live nowadays inside the Burmese borders seem to be descendents of war prisoners made by the Burmans following their incursions in Manipur in 1758, 1764 and 1819, and are still nowadays well known as weaver and astrologists[19]. Contrary to these Burmese Manipuri, the Burmese Chins, also due to the low quality of their lands, have one of the worst economic development index among the hill peoples, lacking of proper transportation and communications[20]. They practice the itinerant corn cultivation in the North and rice cultivation in the South, hunt, fishing and some gathering, but

[18] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, p. 16.
[19] Ibidem.
[20] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 36.

are dependent for food and supplies on the interaction with their neighbours from the lower lands[21].

Although nationalist leaders have claimed a "pan-Chin" or "Zo" identity embracing their Mizo cousins in India, Chin political movements have frequently reflected a more local, regional or even sub-group loyalty.

Image 2. "Major ethnic groups of Burma"
(source: M. Smith, Burma: insurgency and the policy of ethnicity, London, Zed Books, 1991)



Following the arrival of the British, many Chins abandoned their traditional animism and converted to Christianity and some also joined the army. Under colonialism they were divided

[21] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

between Northeast India, the Frontier Areas and Ministerial Burma; at the moment of independence they were at first denied a state of their own; instead they were granted a mountainous "Special Division". The 1974 constitution finally upgraded the Chin Special Division into a 36,017 km2 state, but remained underdeveloped. SLORC's Border Areas Development Programme (BADP) is seen by nationalists an the attempt of altering the ethnic balance of the population through forcible relocation of Chin villagers to new areas. As a traditional escape from poverty, many young Chin men have joined the Tatmadaw, the central government Army. Consequently, the Chin have often been cited as a successful example of co-operative development with their Burman cousins. But although the Chin have not featured in the insurrections to the same degree as other ethnic groups, dissatisfaction has often surfaced[22]. As in late 80ies the nationalist Chin party got some success, in early Nineties its Pm had to seek exile in India, all Chin political parties were declared illegal or deregistered by the government, and around one thousand students and activist fled to India over years[23].

Mon

It is uncertain the number of Mons living nowadays in Burma, shifting the estimation between 1 and 4 millions[24]. They are the descendants of one of the most ancient civilizations of Southeast Asia, having probably descended from China to today Thailand in the IV century B.C. giving birth to the civilization which was origin of the neighbouring Khmer, Tibeto-Burman and Thai people[25]. They maintained a constant contact with India, existing a trace of this link in the name Telangas with which they were known in the XIX century[26]. Belonging to the Mon-Khmer group of the Austroasiatic languages, they have always practiced the rice cultivation as their main economic activity and the Theravada Buddhism as faith[27].

Today the greatest majority of Mon speakers live in the Mon State, which was established in 1974, between the Thai boarder and then Andaman coast. Though the Mons during the Second World War supported Aung San and the mainstream nationalist movement in general, they did not get the delineation of a Mon territory. Later on many Mon communities followed the Karen insurrection of 1949 and under a 1958 cease-fire agreement, the creation of a Mon State was decided by the U Nu government, but implemented not before than 1974[28]. Between the end of the Eighties and the beginning of the Nineties the SLORC's *Tatmadaw* and the Thai army started

[22] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 37.
[23] Ivi, p. 38.
[24] C. Ekeh, M. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[25] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[26] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
[27] Ibidem; C. Ekeh, M. Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[28] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 50.

working in conjunction against the Mon rebels. In 1994 the NMSP (New Mon State Party) under continuing pressure of the Thai authorities who threatened to repatriate the Mon refugees compromised with the SLORC and in 1995 had a ceasefire with the military government. But in areas where ceasefire agreements have not held, the Burmese army has continued to conduct occasional raids, causing severe human rights violation and the continuous displacement and migration of Mon villagers to Thailand. Mon language and culture moreover, which in ancient times introduced in Burma both writing and Buddhism, are under threat though the engagement of monks and intellectuals in preserving them.

According to what Fistié defines an ethnic linkage, to this highly civilized people two other groups of hill-people belonging to the same mon-khmer compound shall be connected; they are the Palaungs and the Was, which can be found in the Northwest and the Northeast of the Shan State[29].

Karen

The Karen belong to the same ethno-linguistic Sino-Tibetan group of the Burmans. They are descendents of a hill people practicing taungyia (slash-and-burn farming)[30] so that previously to the colonial era their economical and societal organization was still pretty primitive. Having part of them settled in the valley among the Mons and later the Burmans, the converted to the wet-rice cultivation. They were not assimilated to the Burmans, differently from the Mons, because considered less developed than these; this made possible that at the end of the colonial era the Karens constituted the main ethnic minority of Burma[31]. The maintenance of national features is due also to the development of a strong nationalism which was boosted by the British rule itself, since, though there was some resistance in the hill, the great majority of the Karens considered the British as the liberators from the oppression of the Burman kings[32]. This sympathy with the British –great part of the Karens joined the British Burma Army and converted to Christianity– caused a polarization between Karens and Burmans which still exists today[33]. Despite this supposed favouritism of the British towards the Karens, the Karen Nationalist Movement (KNM), which was founded at the end of the 19th century by Karens educated in Europe, was disadvantaged by the partition of colonial Burma, which scattered the Karens party in the Ministerial Burma and party in the Frontier Areas. This problem still exists in contemporary Myanamr since the Karen State, formerly part of the Frontier Areas, includes only the 25% of

[29] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
[30] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 42.
[31] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
[32] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 42.
[33] Ivi, pp. 42-43.

the Karen population, causing division and underrepresentation and therefore boosting the claim for a fairer political demarcation[34]. In 1947 the Karen National Union (KNU) was formed and Karen leaders decided to boycott the Panglong Conference and election to the National Constituent Assembly[35] so that the issue remained undecided until after independence. As the British left Burma in 1948, one year later the KNU engaged in a war against Burmese central government for an independent or autonomous state covering much of southern Burma. In 1976 the KNU has started claiming for a federal system rather than a fully independent Karen state. An estimation of the Karen population is not simple since under the label of "Karen" diverse groups coexist, and it depends on whether they are counted as a whole or, as the SLORC prefers, as different groups, so that it shift in a range from 2.5 to 7 millions[36]. Generally speaking the great majority of the Karens, also said proper Karens (around the 70%) belong to two groups, the Sgawa and the Pwo, respectively known to the Burmans as Bama Kayin (Burman Karen) and Talaing Kayin (Mon Karen). To the Karen family are also often associate the Pao or Thaungtu, a sub-group f Karens living in the Southwest of the Shan States, and the Karenni or Red Karens, also known as Kayah, which can be considered as a group aside[37].

Naga

The Nagas belong to the Sino-tibetan family and mainly inhabit the Patkai Range in North Burma; the great majority of the Naga people, possibly over one million, live across the Indian border in the Nagaland state, one of the Northeastern federate of the Indian Republic. The Christian-led Nagaland movement has spread across the border and for many years the two main Naga resistance factions kept military bases in Burma. Naga forces have faced raids by both the Indian and the Burmese government troops into their territory and continuous warfare has kept the Naga Hills underdeveloped and devastated. Although fighting has spanned the frontier, for many years there was no military co-operation between Burmese and Indian government forces but in March 1993 there was collaborative shift in the Naga-policy by both the states, with great fear of the Nagas. Naga activism has faced an increasing division specially following the announcement in mid-1993 of separate talks between one armed Naga faction and the SLORC. Its leader, Khaplang, reportedly wanted to break away from the nationalist movement in India, led by T. Muivah, where the heaviest fighting was then taking place. As a result of these constant

[34] Ivi, p. 43.
[35] Cfr. M. J. Walton, *Ethnicity, Conflict, and History in Burma: The Myths of Panglong*, in "Asian Survey", 2008, Vol. 48, No. 6, pp. 889-910.
[36] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 42.
[37] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

upheavals, the Naga have not yet achieved a clear national identity in the modern political world.[38]

Rakhane and Rohingya

The Rakhane and the Rohingya are two different ethnic groups of Myanmar, strictly linked to each other because living together in the same ethnic state. The Rakhine State, previously known as Arakan, is located on the western coast of Burma, neighbouring with the Bay of Bengal to the West and the Chittagong division of Bangladesh to the Northwest. Beside being another ethnic state, with the Rakhane representing the majority of the population, it is peculiarly characterized by geographical isolation, the presence of the biggest Muslim minority in the country, the Rohingya indeed, who are descendent of Muslims of Bengali origin, and a high percentage of Indians among the population, effect of a more recent immigration. The history of the area is very complex. Arakan has a long past of independence constituting until the end of the XVIII an independent Buddhist realm; the Rakhane inf act, whose language is a peculiar Burman dialect which distinguish them from the majority Bama though belonging to the same ethnic family, are still today mainly Theravada Buddhist. Their history has been characterized by a strong Muslim influence which has started with the Sultanate of Bengal first and developed with the Mogul realm later, due to political vicissitudes and dynastic upheavals. In the XV century the Arakanese king succeeded in conquering back the region, fell under the control of the Burmans, thanks to the help of the Sultan of Bengal, opening the doors to the affluence of Muslims proceeding from the region inside his reign as a consequence. The Islamic influence developed given the positive effect brought to the region by this linkage: the commercial relations with Bengal and Malacca made Arakan a very prosperous state which since 1459 could take over the Indian harbour of Chittagong[39]. Later on, at the end of the XVII century, in a period of political instability the political history of the realm was strongly influenced by the Muslim warriors who had previously arrived to Arakan with the son of the Mogul emperor seeking asylum at the court of the Rakhanese king. This Muslim soldier are considered to be the forefathers of the Rohingya; known as Kaman or Kamanchis ("archer" or "Persian"), in 1710 they were exiled in the region of Ramree where their descendants have assimilated to the Arakanese population keeping their Muslim faith[40]; the Rohingya language, indeed, is a Bengali dialect interspersed with words borrowed from Persian, Urdu and Arakanese[41], and the actual name of the Muslim minority is considered to be the deformation of Rwahaung-ga-kya which means tigers of the ancient village

[38] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, pp. 52-53.
[39] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, p. 17 ; M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 54.
[40] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
[41] B. Lintner, *Burma in Revolt. Opium and Insurgency since 1948*, Boulder, Westview Press, 1994, p. 57.

or braves. After political instability, Arakan was conquered by Burma in 1785, a domination which lasted 40 years. Cruelty by the Burmese troops caused unrest which exploded in the 1794 Arakanese revolt, easily repressed, which brought the survivors to flee to Bengal under the British control. After a new revolt in 1799, in 1811 the Rakhane leader Chin Byian invaded the Arakan from Bengal, passing through the British territory, and proclaimed himself king, giving origin to a conflict between the British East India Company and Burma, which would have led in 1824 to the first Anglo-Burmese war and finally to the annexation of Arakan by the United Kingdom in 1826[42] as part of British India. Later Arakan became part of the province of Burma within the British Indian Empire and finally part of British Burma when it was constituted as a separate colony, no longer merged to India[43].

Another feature which makes the region special is the great presence of Indians, mainly of Muslim faith, who, differently from the Rohingya who also have an Indian ascendant, arrived in the region recently, during the British rule, following migrations which took place in the proceeding from the region of Madras and from what at that time still was Eastern Pakistan, and increased after 1948, also illegally, from Bangladesh[44]. Differently from the Indian settled in other parts of Burma, the Rakhanese Indians represent a stable minority.

The problems of the region are due to the interaction of the exposed peculiarities, which created a controversial situation in which the Rakhane are in conflict with the Muslims –i.e. both original Rohingyas and recent immigrants– and moreover both of the groups –Buddhist ethnic Rakhane and Islamic citizens- collide with the Burman-ruled central government.

Though in the 1930s Arakan was immune to the violence exploded in Lower Burma, which took several hundreds of casualties among the Indian community as well, in 1962 the forced expulsion of Indians acted by Aung San's nationalists caused many Arakanese to stand on the British side and, as a consequence, grudge and detachment in the Rakhine nationalist movement[45].

Many Rakhane consider to have suffered invasion first by the Burmans in 1784, then by the British in the 1820s and finally by the Bengalis. For most of them there is no difference among the Muslim Rakhanese population between proper Rohingya and later immigrants, as they consider "Rohingya" as a term coined in the Fifties to describe Bengali settlers who had been brought in from the British Raj and all those who followed as illegal immigrants, who in their eyes are invasive land-grabbers. This, they consider, added to the threat of Burmanization –

[42] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, p. 21; M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 54.
[43] M. W. Charney, *A History of Modern Burma*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 41-42.
[44] B. Lintner, *op. cit.*, p. 57.
[45] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 55.

which always existed for each autochthonous ethnic minority in Myanmar– the one of Islamization, due to the high birth rate of the Muslims, which the central government tried to control limiting Muslims to two children[46]. The Burmese government seems to promote the same view according to which the Rohingya problem is not the problem of a ethnic minority issue but the one of unregistered illegal immigrants. According to the 1982 Citizenship Act Rohingyas are not recognized as an ethnic group, though those in Burma for three generations could become citizens. This situation of stateless gave the government a justification to persecute them with massive attacks by the *Tatmadaw* in the Seventies which produced great violation of human rights including deportation to camps, causing a mass movement of the Rohingya towards Bangladesh, where still today they live in refugees camps. Despite the pressure put by the Bengali government and other international actors, including the UN and China, to repatriate the refugee, Myanmar refuses to accept back those who do not meet the criteria of the 1982 Citizenship Law. Still today the violence against Muslims in Rakhine state continues and according to many observers the state government is practising ethnic cleansing. The Rohingya in vain maintain that they are original dwellers of Arakan. Moreover, Muslim armed rebels are nowadays organized in two Mujahid groups, the Rohingya Solidarity Organisation and Arakan Rohingya Islamic Front, whose activity is nevertheless not very effective[47].

Somehow paradoxically, Rakhane and Muslims actually share the common independent claims and opposition to the central government. Both Arakanese procommunist and Muslim rebel groups took up arms even before the British had left Burma and, not appeased by the constitution of the Rakhine State in 1974 under the BSPP's constitution, different Rakhine, Muslim and communist movements prosecuted in their militancy[48].

The reciprocal contrast existing in the Rakhine State among Rakhane, Roinghya/Muslims and Rangoon, in conclusion, hides not only ethnic discrimination, implemented by the Burmese government in incredibly cruel ways, but also economical dynamics and problems of cultural clash and assimilation. This situation of continuous instability made the former prosperous Arakan one of the poorest state of Myanmar.

Shan

The Shan people are one of Myanmar's most numerous minorities and are not related to any other ethnic family since constitute one of the branches of the Thai group together with the Thais

[46] Banyan, *Why Buddhists and Muslims in Rakhine state in Myanmar are at each others' throats*, in "The Economist", 3rd November 2012, URL: http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21565638-why-buddhists-and-muslims-rakhine-state-myanmar-are-each-others%E2%80%99-throats-unforgiving.

[47] Ibidem.

[48] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 56.

and Laotians. The name Shan indeed has been given to them by the Burmans while they call themselves as Dtai or Tai/Dai[49]. They have settled down in the East and in the North of actual Burma before the first half of the 11th century. Even though they have been influenced by the Burmans adopting from them the Theravada Buddhism, they have safeguarded till the modern era their peculiarities, not only linguistically but also in terms of socio-political system. Their organization was characterized by a strong fragmentation and total lack of a centralized state since every basin valley constituting a paddy also represented a mong apart, ruled by an hereditary chief called saohpas, sawbwa in Burman[50]. The Shan society was strongly hierarchical, with the highest administrative functions monopolized by the nobility of the *soahpas* court. This reality continued even during the XX century, helped by the British who at the beginning of the century founded schools for the sons of the Shan leaders, reservoir of the great part of the administrative cadres of the post independence Shan State. The Shans moreover practiced especially the wet rice cultivation, as their aptitude in trading was frustrated by the advent of the Chinese merchants who followed the arrival of the British. For all these reasons, the Shan society with its somewhat "feudal" characteristics resisted until the middle of the XX century[51].

In the Shan States, the Shan themselves lived only in the valleys where they could practice the wet rice cultivation, being the rest of the territory occupied by a variety of hill people; this include the Danu, the Intha and the Taungyo (the three belonging to the Burman family), the Palaung, the Was and the Lau/Lisaw (the three from the mon-khmer family), the "long-necked" Karens, the Kachin, the Panthay Chinese (also known, like in China as "Hui" or "Hui zu" or with the name of their ancestors, "Hui Hui"), and the Kokang Chinese, settled in Kokang, the Northeastern area of the Shan States, centre of the opium cultivation and boarder trade[52]. The Indians living in the Shan States were a lot less than the Chinese, and actually they were mainly Gurkhas originally from Nepal who, after having served in the British army, remained in the country[53].

The Shan states have never been united until the arrival of the British, but after the fall of the Burman Pagan dynasty in 1287 the Shan expanded in the most of Upper Burma and established subdued the other ethnic groups to their power, being rival to the Burmans for the control of the entire area until 1604, when they stopped resisting and accepted the indirect rule by the Bamas.

[49] B. Lintner, *op. cit.*, p. 45.
[50] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.
[51] Ivi, pp. 7-8.
[52] B. Lintner, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-51.
[53] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-12.

In matter of fact, anyways, the Shan states remained independent even under the Burmans thanks to the aforesaid *saohpas* system, which resisted both to the Bama's and to the Chinese's pressure.

Their political status however underwent drastic changes Great change in the political configuration of the states occurred in the 19th century as a consequence of the competition of French and British colonialism in Southeast Asia. In front of the ongoing French expansion which had already incorporated Laos on the East, the British decided to encompass in their sphere also the wild Shan States on the North, in order to avoid the formation of an uncontrollable buffer state and to control the trans-Burma trade roads driving to the Qing Empire, which crossed the Shan states indeed[54].

Under the British rule the about thirty Shan States acquired the status of protectorates, whose conditions were in matter of facts analogous to those of the Indian princely states, and the *saohpas* got their command recognized and warranted. In this way the Shan maintained their traditional independence, enjoining an exceptional status when compared to that of Lower Burma, which was under any point of view a directly administrated colony[55].

In 1922 with the creation of the Federated Shan States all the principalities came to share for the first time a common governing body, the Federated Shan States' Council.

Being the colonialist plan that of developing the Burmese lowlands into a rice-exporter granary for India, the British were not really able to exploit the resources of the land and, as a consequence, the colonial era was for the Shan States a time of peace and stability but also of economic and political stasis[56].

After independence from the British, the federated Shan States merged into one state, the Shan State, and incorporated into the new Union of Burma. Along with the 1947 constitution it obtained the right to secession after a ten-years trial period and the *sawbwas* were allowed to keep many of their traditional feudal rights also in the democratic Burma. During the fifties the relations with the Anti-Fascist People's Freedom League (AFPFL) deteriorated and as Guomindang troops were continuously invading the Shan State from China, the U Nu government sent the *Tatmadaw* to the state for the first time. In 1958-59 Ne Win persuaded the Shan *swabwas* to give up their traditional rights but resistance grew giving birth to a cultural revival movement, to block which Ne Win did his coup in 1962. As in 1968 Mao Zedong ordered military backing to the Communist Party of Burma (CPB) as a consequence of the break

[54] B. Lintner, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
[55] Ivi, p. 48.
[56] Ibidem.

with Rangoon consequent to the anti-Chinese riots of one year before, the People's Liberation Army seized control of the region East of the Salween river.

Meanwhile, throughout 1970s and 1980s Shan, Palaung, Kachin, Pao, Kayan, Wa and Lahu ethnic forces established their own "liberated zones". To resist against the central government all the ethnicities paid a high price in terms of deaths and economical loss. Nowadays the almost unique revenue for the people refugee in the mountain is opium. As the CPB collapsed a ceasefire was signed with Rangoon and the ethnic chiefs were entitled to keep their arms and police their territories; consequently the opium and heroine production expanded.

The configuration of the Shan State politics is very uncertain: no definitive political deal has been made and the SLORC seems to practice the old *divide et impera* strategy making different promises to the different ethnicities. Despite the ceasefires armed clashes occurred again in rural areas, sometimes between opposition groups but also with the SLORC, who, according to some critics, is increasing the military control over the zone and assimilating the minorities[57].

Karenni

The Karenni, which mean "red Karens", are a Karen-related group, mainly living in the Kayah (formerly Karenni) State, born consequently to the establishment by the chiefs of the Kayah (i.e. the main ethnic sub-group within the Karenni) of a princely state[58]. Considered one of the less technologically and culturally advanced people in Burma, they have remained animist, practicing the cult of the Natts[59], or converted to Christianity following the British missions, but have been influenced by the Shan, living partly in the South of the actual Shan State, under their same political organisations, since they adopted the *saohpas*/*sawbwas* system. The Karenni states were recognized as independent and separated by the rest of Burma with an agreement signed in 1875 by the representatives of the British Crown and the King of Burma, but, though officially outside British Burma, in matter of facts the Karenni states enjoyed the same status of the Shan States, similar to those of the princely states in British India[60]. Under the 1947 they got the right to secession after a ten-year trial period. In 1948 the Karenni leader U Bee Htu Re was killed and the uprising which consequently broke out is persisting still today. In 1952 the name of the Karenni State was "politically" changed by the central government into "Kayah State" to promote division among the Karens, and the legal right to secession disappeared with the 1974 constitution. Since then on the state has been steadily militarized, and together with troops growing numbers of Burman migrants have been brought there, while the Karenni has been

[57] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 62.
[58] Ivi, p. 48.
[59] P. Fistié, *op. cit.*, p. 4.
[60] B. Lintner, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

forcibly relocated[61]. Nowadays the Kayah State is one of the smallest and poorest within the Union of Myanmar. Despite the ceasefires signed during the Nineties with the armed Karenni rebels and the pressure for pacification from neighbouring Thailand, the incursion of the Burmese Army continued, causing a situation of humanitarian emergence[62].

Indians and Chinese

Inside the complex picture of the diverse ethnicities of Myanmar the Indians and the Chinese are exceptional groups because, though they are important minorities, because of their being non-autochthonous and recently settled in Burma they are denied the status of nationalities and are bypassed in dealing with the issue of minorities. The presence of both on the Burmese affairs dates long back given the close relation of the country with the two big neighbours: Burma had always been one of the main crossroads linking India, Indo-China and China and, as travelling by land was safer, it inevitably became a compulsory gateway[63] for the trading routes which linked the three macro-regions.

Indian influence originated during the Mon empires[64], introducing Buddhism and an alphabet based on the *pali*[65]. The presence of Indians continued through the rise and fall of the various kingdoms, being stronger in the Northwest of the country, even giving birth in Arakan, nowadays the Rakhine State, to the exceptional story of the Rohingya Muslim of Bengali descent. The number of Indian on Burmese soil multiplied steadily during the British era, since they were brought inside the country, which until 1935 was part of British India, to work in the different fields of the colonial establishment: infrastructures, services, administration, army and also agriculture. Relying in the comparative advantage given by the fact that many of the British companies active in Rangoon had already developed in India, Indians were more familiar with commerce and modern finance than the Burmans, and easily dominated trade and commerce in all the main urban centres[66]. Indian immigrants proceeded from different parts of the subcontinent –Chittagong, Ooriya, Bihar, Orissa, Madras, United Provinces of Northern India- and often the economical specialization happened along national lines, which each of these subgroups monopolizing a different economic activity[67]. Anyways the most famous and most detested by the Burmans of the profession exercised by the South Asian immigrants was that of the money-lenders, also know as *Chettyars* or *Chettiars*. The *Chettyars* were a money-lending

[61] M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 48.
[62] Ivi, p. 49.
[63] M. Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1967, p. 3.
[64] The Mon domination started in 9th century and lasted, with some interruptions, until 1757, giving birth to three kingdoms. Cfr. M. Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-10.
[65] B. Lintner, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[66] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-24.
[67] Ibidem, p. 24.

caste indigenous of Chettinad in the Madras Presidency and operated through widely caste family networks channelling capital between India and Burma, which was their main area of interest. Though they were not the only money-lenders active in Burma, they were the most numerous. From 1890 on rural lands were progressively alienated to moneylenders, phenomenon which reached a peak in 1930 consequently to the international rice market crisis[68]. Though in the alienation of the field they were involved not alone but together with British banks and also Burmese money-lenders, *Chettyars* were especially despised for being foreigners, as a consequence of the xenophobic sentiment developed by the economic frustration of the Burmans in front of the success and the apparent favouritism in business enjoyed by the immigrants entered in Burma after the British. This feeling of alienation in their own country of the Burmans, especially perceivable in the capital city, brought to the rise of village associations in the 1920s and the Saya San rebellion in 1930[69]. The nationalist movement which finally originated from these events indeed was not only against the British, but even more against the *kala*, name which identified in pejorative way the South Asians[70].

On the other side, the relations with the Chinese minority -whose influence in Burma dates back to 1287 AD and the fall of the ancient capital Pagan to the Mongol armies of Kublai Khan- was generally better since the Burmese always felt closer to these rather than to the Indians, because of the Chinese propensity to intermarriage and the fact that the size of the Chinese community was not so overwhelming like in the Indian case, so to maintaining a low level of hostility[71]. This did not prevent them to experience the violence by Burmans in occasion of the major riots which broke out consequently to the Great Depression in 1930 and, especially, the strong anti Chinese hate which broke out in 1967 in Rangoon, causing also an attack to the Chinese embassy, and spread in the country, bringing the PRC to break the diplomatic relation with Ne Win government[72].

The Burmans developed the hate towards the immigrants basically because of economic and political frustration. Being considered by the British less developed or efficient than the Indians or the Chinese as employees and businessmen or simply more expensive as labour, they soon joined their intolerance against the Asian immigrants with the anti-British resistance[73]; as a matter of facts, the Chinese and the Indians dominated the commerce in almost every city of Burma and the Indians were preferred to the Burmans for working in the administration of the

[68] B. Lintner, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[69] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-17.
[70] B. Lintner, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[71] Ibidem.
[72] P. Fistié, pp. 343-347.
[73] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

state and its military forces; Rangoon especially, economic centre where the great majority of both the minorities considered lived, well represented this situation with its ethnic ghettoes, its immigrant success stories and a social hierarchy which put the Burmese at the lowest place, the Asian in the middle and the Europeans (and the Anglo-Burmans too) at the top[74].

Though the domestic politics of Myanmar has changed, the relations with the PRC reborn in Eighties, Indians and Chinese are still today ghost-minorities inside the Burmese puzzle: the two of them have been the most strongly targeted by the citizenship law of 1982 which imposed that no status of Burmese citizen will be recognized to those who cannot demonstrate to have ancestors who are Burma-based since three generations at least[75].

I.3. Religion

I.3.1. Religions of Burma

Myanmar population include worshippers of all the main religions: Buddhists represent the majority of the population in Myanmar, but there are also Christians, Hindus, Muslims, animists, Chinese Taoists, Confucians and a reduced number of Jews[76].

Hinduism obviously entered the country due to its proximity to India, and then increased as a result of the Indian migration promoted by the colonial administration: elements of Hindu heritage constitute a component of the typical Myanmarese culture and way of thinking, mixed with the teaching of Buddhism, which represents the core of Burmese *weltanschauung*.

Buddhism on the other hand (as will be more extensively analysed later) entered the country through the Indian border as well, being India the homeland of the Sakyamuni Buddha.

The Muslim component of the citizenship instead is mainly ascribed to two groups, very different from each other; a minor part of Burmese Muslims belong to one of the minority hill-people native of nowadays China, having a remote Turko-Persian descent, which is common to the people who in China are called Hui zu[77], to which these Muslim hill people are commonly associated. The greatest number of the Myanmarese Burmans instead are representatives of the Rohingya minority, settled in the Northeastern Rakhine State and different from the previous due

[74] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 24-26, 37.

[75] As Smith says «the 1982 citizenship law seems specifically targeted against Chinese and Indians. This technically limits the rights of full citizenship to those who can prove ancestors resident in Burma before the first British annexation in 1824, however 'indigenous races', such as the Shan, Karen and Burman, are exempted»; Cfr. M. Smith, A. Allsebrook (in collaboration with), *op. cit.*, p. 64.

[76] S. Myat Yin, J. Elias, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

[77] Passim, *Ethnicity*.

to their ancestry, which is Indian, Bengali in particular, and their minor inclination to assimilation.

The Christian influence arrived in Burma first with the Portuguese and the earliest conversions to Christianity took place around the early 17th century[78]. A significant number of Karens, Chin, Kachin, and Burmans are Baptists and, secondarily, Catholics. Christian missionaries were active from the colonial period up to the mid-1960s, establishing schools and running hospitals and social welfare centres, which were of high standards and provided good-quality services, being these establishments nationalized by the government after 1962[79].

Taoism as well as Confucianism, on the contrary, came from East, brought through a long-lasting cultural exchange with the former Chinese Empire and later improved, as for Hinduism, by the arrival of Chinese immigrants which settled in the country during the colonial era.

According to the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar «The main religions of the country are Buddhism (89.2%), Christianity (5.0%), Islam (3.8%), Hinduism (0.5%), Spiritualism (1.2%) and others (0.2%)»[80], numbers which are substantially confirmed by other sources[81]. But the same governmental source also states that «Religious intolerance or discrimination on grounds of religion is nonexistent in the Union of Myanmar throughout its long history»[82], which is undoubtedly untrue, especially regarding the most recent political history which saw various coups bringing to power different generals[83]. Contemporary Burma indeed has experienced and is still experiencing nowadays the troubles of religious conflicts, which are caused by the interference of the generals with religion and also by the involvement of the highest religious authority of the country, the *sangha*, in the political affairs of the country.

I.3.2. Theravada Buddhism in Burma

Theravada is the oldest branch of Buddhism still surviving nowadays, practiced by the 89-90% of the Burmese and majoritarian also in Sri Lanka (70% of the population), Cambodia (95%),

[78] S. Myat Yin, J. Elias, *op. cit.*, p. 77.
[79] Ibidem.
[80] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Union of the Republic of Myanmar, *Religions of Myanmar*, URL: http://www.mofa.gov.mm/aboutmyanmar/religion.html.
[81] CIA, *The World Factbook*, URL: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/bm.html#People.
[82] Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Government of the Union of the Republic of Myanmar, *Religions of Myanmar*, URL: http://www.mofa.gov.mm/aboutmyanmar/religion.html.
[83] Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labour of the US Department of State, *International Religious Freedom Report for 2012. Burma*, URL: http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/religiousfreedom/index.htm#wrapper.

Laos (67%) and Thailand (95%)[84]. Its origin is linked to the third council held in Pataliputra around 250 b.C. by the Indian Emperor Asoka, which gave rise to the Sthaviravada school[85], from which Theravada claims descent, in particular from the Vibhajjavada current within the Sthaviravada[86].

After the council the Theravada soon spread to Sri Lanka through South India and from there it reached Burma, where many kingdoms, like the Mon, the Pyus and the Bamar, had already adopted the Mahayana Buddhism and soon converted to the new doctrine[87].

Nowadays Theravada is a fundamental element of Burmese life, being the country the biggest Buddhist nation in the world in terms of percentage of monks in the population (half a million) and proportion of income invested in religion practices[88]. The Theravada is professed by the Burmans, the majority ethnicity, and among the Shans, the Arakanese (Rakhine), the Mons, the Karens and the Chinese who have well assimilated to the Burmese lifestyle. Moreover, among many groups, like the Bamars and the Shans, the Buddhist belief and practice cohabit with the worship of the spirits called *Natts*, which in the indigenous animist tradition are considered to interfere and intercede in the mundane affairs, in accordance to the Burmese saying which commands to «Adore the Buddha, but fear the *Natts*»[89].

According to Burmese ethics, the most venerable individuals within the society are the monks, followed by teachers and parents[90]. The monks, which are called *sangha* as a collectivity, benefit of the best living standards and of the highest respect from the Myanmarese not only due to their religious role but also to their involvement in common people's life. Monks have historically been the principal depositaries of culture, not only the theological but also the secular one, and they have always contributed to the education of the upper class and also to the alphabetization of the common people. Monasteries are neither alien nor inaccessible places, nor simple temples to pray and to do rituals, but acts as a shelter for those who are lost or in need, as an asylum for those who seek advices or a period of reflection, as a school for those who wish to receive a Buddhist education or for who cannot afford school fees[91], and also as a substitute of the hotel

[84] CIA, *The World Factbook: East and Southeast Asia*, URL: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/wfbExt/region_eas.html.
[85] The word *Theravada* is derived from the Sanskrit *Sthaviravada*, literally "teaching of the elders".
[86] M. Piantelli, *Il buddhismo indiano*, in G. Filoramo (ed.), *Storia delle religioni - Religioni dell'India e dell'Estremo Oriente (Vol. 4)*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 1996, pp. 277-368, p. 310.
[87] H. Bechert, *Il buddhismo contemporaneo nello Sri Lanka e nel Sud-Est asiatico*, in G. Filoramo (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 452-453; S. Gil, *op. cit.*, p. 2.
[88] Ivi, p. 4.
[89] S. Myat Yin, J. Elias, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82; H. Bechert, *op. cit.*, p. 458.
[90] S. Myat Yin, J. Elias, *op. cit.*, p. 90.
[91] S. Gil, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

for native travellers[92]. Monks are paid respect and offers also due to the duty of the *dana*: the refusal of food by a monk is equal to the worst excommunication, envisaging bad consequences for the soul of the believer. The importance of the acceptance of the offer by the monks was the core of the symbolic "bowl upside down" protest, also known as Saffron Revolution, led by the *sangha* in 2007 against the government[93].

The Theravada deeply influences the Burmese way of life not only in the religious belief and practice, as exposed, but also in terms of social and political values. A number of important principles can be deduced by the Theravada religious teachings: the first one is the concept of social upliftment through cosmic assistance, derived by the centrality of the Shakyamuni as focus of worship. As mentioned before indeed, the Theravada tradition emphasizes the importance of Gautama Buddha, reducing that of the *Bodhisattvas*. Moreover, it considers that the self-liberation can be pursued by merit accumulation through actions and deeds. Since, at the level of social manifestation, the Buddha finds his correspondent in the Buddhist abbot, opportunities of material progress within the Burmese social hierarchy are to be sought through and in accordance with the *sangha*[94].

Another politically relevant principle is the right/duty to actively intervene against adversities in life, deduced by the importance of the *dullabha*, the human life; according to the Theravada indeed, the teachings of the Buddha clearly show that life is regarded as precious and that humiliation and dehumanization of the people allow the Buddhist to fight against such injustices[95]. In respect of the *dullabha* then, the Burmese shall act in order to alter the life condition they got and improve them, instead of leaving the change to the *samsara*, the cycle of reincarnations; this, in political terms, could be translated as a right/duty to "resistance against oppression" and to "rebellion".

This reasoning is closely related to the standard of the good Buddhist king, since the resistance/rebellion against the ruler can be legitimate as long as the duties of the last one are clearly established. Since Theravada explicitly enumerates the qualities and duties of the good monarch, consequently the infraction of these allows the disavowal of the ruling power by the ruled ones. According to the ideal standard of the Buddhist monarch, which is incarnated by the Indian Emperor Asoka, the king, to be obeyed and respected by his subjects, must comply with

[92] S. Myat Yin, J. Elias, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

[93] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-197; S. Gil, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-11; S. M. A. Aljunied, *Politics and religion in contemporary Burma: Buddhist monks as opposition*, in "The Yonsei Journal of International Studies", 2010, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 37-50, URL: http://yonseijournal.files.wordpress.com/2012/08/politics-and-religion-in-contemporary-burma.pdf, pp. 45-48.

[94] S. M. A. Aljunied, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

[95] Ivi, pp. 41-42.

the *dasa raja dhamma* (ten duties of the king), which include the *dana* (liberality), the *pariccaga* (sacrifice for the people), *avihimsa* (non-violence) and *avirodha* (non-opposition)[96]; Theravada Buddhism, in sum, prescribes roles for the ruler and the ruled which, like in a contract, are clearly defined, and therefore, if violated, enable the "injured party" to take action for the restoration of the lost balance.

It is interesting to notice that there is a special denomination for those monks who are politically committed. "*Pongyi*" is the name for those of the *sangha* who, as a socio-political vanguard of the society, mediate between the power and the people and, responsible of the welfare of the community, are entitled to oppose those who act evilly. The justification of such a political commitment of these monks lies in the fact that, being sons of Buddha, they work for others' good following the life example of the Enlightened, who, proceeding on his way to enlightenment, engaged in mundane affairs[97].

The proximity of the monks to the people, given by the aforesaid involvement of the monkhood and the monastery in Burmese daily life through a variety of ways, but also and especially by the almsround though which the *sangha* receives food and resources from the believers, make these guardians of the nation on their turn dependent on those they defend. This closeness has shown all its political potential when acted as a basis for mobilizing the people as the *sangha* protested against the generals' government, somehow becoming "public conscience" of the Burmese citizens[98].

I.3.3. Buddhism and Burmese politics

The characterization of Burma as a mainly Buddhist country is fundamental to understand its politics, which is strongly influenced by this feature not only in terms of common ethics, sensibility of the people and political rhetoric, but also in very concrete ways. As mentioned earlier, indeed, the two highest national authorities, the military power and the monks, interact with each other, in terms of both collaboration and contrast, in shaping the political evolution of the country.

This double intersection happened in various ways, depending on the historical period considered and on the actors involved. The military rule has disposed of religion in various ways, promoting Buddhist ethics in order to acquire legitimacy emulating the tradition of the ancient Buddhist Burmese kings, attempting to control the *sangha*, i.e. the collectivity of the monks, by

[96] Ivi, p. 42.
[97] Ibidem.
[98] Ivi, p. 43.

institutionalizing it under a governmental Ministry, but also officially promoting Buddhism by donations and the affirmation of it as official religion of the state, which can be seen both as a way to strengthen the *sangha* and as an attempt of subjecting it to sphere of the State. In addition to this, the regime, which is overruled by Burmans, has as well used the Buddhist element (which is a strong feature of identification of the Burman majority but also of other important minorities like the Shan and the Mons)[99] to promote its cultural assimilation policies against non-Buddhist minorities, through the construction of temples in areas of non-Buddhist majority. In some cases, it is claimed, this has been done using forced labour of minority individuals, victims of forced relocation[100].

Monks also, despite the ancient prohibition of meddling with politics, have played their role. Historically, they have been the counterpart of the Burmese rulers, and after some time of detachment from the mundane affairs, came back to their old function as boosters of national identity in anti-British function and as promoters of democracy under the regime. Recently their already strong political role has further expanded as a result of the rise of an islamophobic movement, led by one of the most popular and charismatic monks of the country against the Rohingya minority, which contributed to the presentation, months ago, of the law regulating mixed Buddhist-Muslim marriages.

The Shakyamuni Buddha was son of a *kshatriya* family within an aristocratic society, i.e. member of the noble caste of worriors, but after his adhesion to asceticism he avoided any implication in politics. This extraneousness of Buddhism with regards to political affairs was a plus which advantaged the religion in spreading throughout South India, but ended when the Maurya Emperor Asoka converted and became an example of Buddhist king. Asoka indeed directly intervened in matters regarding both the organization of the *sangha* and the orthodoxy of the doctrine itself, relaying on his political authority to convene the third Buddhist council aimed to the reform of the *sasana*, i.e. the Buddhist order[101]. In this way a close relation between political power and the *sangha* was established, liaison which did not last in India as the Maurya dynasty fell, but survived in the rest of the Theravada countries, where Asoka kept being brought as standard of the ideal relation between state and *monks*.

As a consequence, according to what could be defined the "Theravada political doctrine", the ruler is responsible for the welfare of the *sangha* and is entitled to censor those monks who

[99] C. N. Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

[100] ILO (International Labour Organization), *Forced Labour in Myanmar (Burma)*, 1998, URL:http://www.ilo.org/public/english/standards/relm/gb/docs/gb273/myanmar.htm; Amnesty International, *Annual Report 2012: Myanmar*, 2012, URL: http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/myanmar/report-2012#ai-reports.

[101] H. Bechert, *op. cit.*, p. 458.

violates the *vinaya*, i.e. the juridical norms which regulate the life in the order. Though guaranteeing the respect of the *vinaya* by the monks and punishing those who have contradicted it with their perverse behaviour should be competence of the Buddhist spiritual jurisdiction, religious tribunals had no power to ensure the effectiveness of such measures whose execution, as a consequence, fell within the political sphere of powers[102].

Various times monks acted in such a way as to merit the exclusion from the *sangha.* This led to the necessity of a reform of the *sasana*, which took place through the Buddhist councils, general assemblies aimed to state rules and fixed points about the holy scriptures[103]. The last one was held in Rangoon between 1954 and 1961 following the convocation by no less than premier U Nu[104].

This shows that the recent implication of the Burmese government in the *sangha* affairs is a form of reappropriation by the State of ancient prerogatives which had been historically owned by Buddhist rulers. Since in ancient times regular relations between State and *sangha* were established in southern Buddhist countries in a similar way, in these states Theravada became a sort of state religion: while in Thailand this situation remained unchanged until contemporary times, in Sri Lanka and Burma the connection was interrupted by the colonial rule and the state as a result lost his control over religion. This is one of the reason which led to the emergence of the so called "political Buddhism" in the recent history of both the countries[105].

In the case of Myanmar indeed the infiltration of the government in religious affairs have been frequent and important, revealing an intention by the junta of reacquiring the ancient prerogatives of the Buddhist kings over the *sangha*. Between 1949 and 1961 the U Nu government blended Buddhism and *natts* with politics: most important of all, in 1956 the Sixth Great Buddhist World Council was held; Buddhism also became part of the school curriculum and Ecclesiastical Courts and Pali universities were created. The Buddha Sasana Council, aimed to the promotion of Buddhism, was created and in 1960 the U Nu electoral campaign, under pressure of the *sangha*, included the making of Buddhism the official state religion as a point of its programme[106].

In 1962, after seizing power through a coup, Ne Win proposed the "Burmese Way to Socialism"[107], strongly influenced by Buddhist cosmology and terminology. In 1979, within the

[102] Ibidem.
[103] Ivi, p. 459.
[104] S. Gil, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[105] H. Bechert, *op. cit.*, p. 460.
[106] S. McCarthy, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.
[107] B. Matthews, *The Present Fortune of Tradition-Bound Authoritarianism in Myanmar*, in "Pacific Affairs", 1998, Vol. 71, No. 1, pp. 7-23, URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/2760820, pp. 10-11.

Ministry of Religious Affairs, the Department for the Promotion and Propagation of the Sasana was created, together with a number of committees and in 1980 nine Myanmar Buddhist sects were united. Furthermore, the government reorganized as well the Vinaya Judicial Courts (religious tribunals) and started sponsoring the state Pali examination and many monastic schools[108]. Many analysts stress the fact that the junta took possess over the practice of the *dana* as a mean of legitimizing its power, through a "state-merit making" consisting in the construction of pagodas and other official offering ceremonies[109]. The junta has also drawn from Buddhist tradition in terms of political rhetoric, but in a very different way respect to the democratic movement of Aung San Su Kyi, which also relies on Buddhist cultural features as a political appeal; while Suu Kyi links Buddhism to a democratic form of government, the military rule promotes the idea that their legitimacy is based on the ancient kingly duty of maintaining order through the preservation of Buddhist traditions[110].

As mentioned, in Myanmar history, the ruler was the main supporter of religion on one hand and the *sangha* had a sort of constitutional check upon the ruler, preventing despotism and tyranny[111]. This created a link of interdependence between the king and the *sangha*, one supporting and balancing the other. During colonial times, in contrast, the ecclesiastical order, due to the secularization of Burma and the "non-interference in religious matters" policy by the British, came to lack of traditional political support from "the centre"; this negligence by the British caused the emergence of a nationalism with substantial Buddhist basis[112]. Due to these reasons in modern times the political activism of the monks was linked to anti-colonialism, nationalism and the process of the nation building, both in pro- and anti-governmental sense.

Burmese monks, after a period of extraneousness due to the prohibition to mingle with politics into force under the Burman kingdom, restarted being politically involved during the colonial era, developing an anti-colonialist consciousness whose *casus belli* was the so called "shoe issue"[113]: monks led protests against the British who intentionally refused to take off shoes inside the pagodas, a gesture which was considered highly offensive of Burmese value system, expressing the need of restoring a political power which was coherent with the Buddhist heritage of the nation[114].

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[108] S. McCarthy, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6; S. Gil, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.
[109] McCarthy, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-24.
[110] Ivi, p. 16.
[111] K. Maung Nyunt, *An Anthology of Conference Papers: Religion in Myanmar Culture and History*, Yangon, University of Yangon, 2003, pp. 181-182.
[112] S. Gil, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[113] Ivi, p. 472.
[114] S. McCarthy, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

In the Twenties monks and lay people created the "General Council of Burmese Associations", a movement which aimed to the independence of the country. Between the two World Wars the activism of the monks increased and, together with the Youth Male Buddhist Association (YMBA), the *sangha* was the main militant force for the liberation of the country[115]. Two monks in particular, U Uttama e U Wizaya became martyrs of the Burmese movement of liberation and are regarded as fathers of modern Burmese nationalism[116], while between 1930 and 1932 the monk Saya San led a peasant rebellion against the British imposition of tax collection and was finally executed[117]. Leading the national movement against the colonial oppression what the monks did was not dissimilar from their historical function of check and balances against the excesses of the political power; also, the monks seemed to be acting in accordance to their function of socio-political vanguard of the nation, expressing the political consciousness of the citizenship and boosting the mass mobilization, according to the aforementioned political principle deducible from Theravada doctrine[118].

The monks kept serving the nation even later, in collaboration with the governmental power, when they contributed to the creation of the new ideology proposed by general Ne Win in 1962 as the new leading philosophy of Burmese development. The so called "Burmese way to socialism" indeed, though considered at the time a lay doctrine, included a number of elements typical of Buddhist cosmology and under many points of view appeared to be influenced by Burmese tradition rather than contemporary Marxism[119].

The *sangha*'s role of political mobilizers assumed pro-democratic function along with the increase of the excesses by the junta and the worsening of the living condition of the Burmese following its unsuccessful economy policies. This happened during the people's revolution of 1988[120], during which strong political interventions by big groups of monks occurred[121], and even more clearly during the Saffron revolution in 2007, whose absolute protagonist was the *sangha* itself. The monks, without coordination nor permission of the highest levels of the *sasana*, gave birth to a spontaneous protest aimed to force the government to consider the economic situation of the Myanmarese –whose worsening, moreover, caused a reduction in the offering of food and alms, resulting in an impoverishment of the monks as well[122]. They acted a

[115] S. Gil, *op. cit.*, p. 7; M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
[116] Ivi, pp. 32-33; S. Gil, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[117] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-16; S. Gil, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
[118] Passim.
[119] H. Bechert, *op. cit.*, pp. 473-474; see also: S. McCarthy, *op. cit.*, pp. 5-6.
[120] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-17.
[121] H. Bechert, *op. cit.*, p. 474.
[122] S. M. A. Aljunied, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

pattaneikkuzana, a boycott of the offers from the Buddhist offender[123]: given the strong religious importance of the *dana*, turning the alms bowls upside down the monks excommunicated the junta, undermining its political legitimacy. In addition to this, the All Burma Monks Alliance Group presented to the government four demands, including the reduction of the prices of various items, the release of political prisoners, including Aung San Su Kyi, and the opening of a dialogue with democratic opposition forces; in this way the essence of the protest appeared to be not only moral, but also highly political.

Recently the involvement of the *sangha* in Burmese politics has been discussed again due to the development of an anti-Rohingya front led by two charismatic and powerful monks, as a consequence of the recrudescence of the Muslim-Buddhist conflict which happened some months ago. The violence erupted in the locality of Meiktila (200 km South of Mandalay) after the rape and murder of a Buddhist woman allegedly by three Muslims[124]; it was the occasion for long-standing ethnic tensions to come out again and it resulted in the burning of about 82 buildings in the Muslim block of the city by Buddhist mobs, which caused the exodus of great number of homeless partly interned in refugee camps partly dispersed on the way towards the Bengali border. Consequently to the humanitarian emergency various monks have enforced denial of humanitarian assistance to Muslims, ordering to locals not to associate with the group and refusing to accept international aid destined to the Rohingya. In addition to this, many noticed that Buddhist involved in the crimes were given, as usual, lighter sentences than Muslims[125].

The Buddhist anti-Muslim violence and boycott seems to reflect the growing islamophobic sentiment promoted throughout the country by the so called 969 movement led by Ashin Wirathu, its unofficial leader, often referred to as the "Burmese Bin Laden"[126]. The movement is characterized by a call for the return to Buddhist orthodoxy and prominence without any compromise, starting from its name, "969" which represents the Buddhist *tiratana* ("three jewels"), consisting in nine special attributes of Lord Buddha (9), six fundamental teachings (6) and nine attributes of monkhood (9). Wirathu, already sentenced in 2003 to 25 years in jail for inciting anti-Muslim hatred but later released in 2010 following a general amnesty for political prisoners, declared to be proud to considered a radical Buddhist, and that "If Myanmar wants to

[123] S. Gil, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[124] H. Hindstorm, *Burma's monks call for Muslim community to be shunned*, in "The Independent", 25th July 2012, URL: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/burmas-monks-call-for-muslim-community-to-be-shunned-7973317.html.

[125] The Associated Press, *Buddhist Get Prison Terms in Myanmar*, in "The New York Times", 11th July 2013, URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/12/world/asia/buddhists-get-prison-terms-in-myanmar.html?_r=0.

[126] The Diplomat, *The Mad monks of Myanmar*, in "The Diplomat", 9th July 2013, URL: http://thediplomat.com/2013/07/09/the-mad-monks-of-myanmar/.

live in peace, Buddhist and Muslims have to live separately", "Muslims are fundamentally bad. Mohammed allows them to kill any creature. Islam is a religion of thieves, they do not want peace"[127]. 696 movement's activism is not limited to the release of sermons, which many considers responsible of the growing religious violence, but also aims to directly impact Burmese Muslim reality through legal means. The 696 proposed an interfaith marriage law which, inspired by similar legislation in Singapore, hopes to limit the number of Buddhist women who marry Muslim men, establishing the permission from local authority to do so as compulsory[128]. It is the latest attempt to obstacle the so called "love Jihad" which, pointing the finger on the allegedly higher demographic growth of the Muslim, is considered responsible of the growing Islamic population in Burma, at the expenses of the Buddhist one.

Myanmar government had already supported such a demographic containment subjecting only Muslim families to a two-children policy. In addition to this, Burma's president Thein Sein seemed to align with the position of 696 with words and with facts: he took the part of Wirathu after the Time magazine dedicated him the cover page dubbing the monk as "the face of Burmese terror" and, though receiving the UN Secretary's critics and incitement to deal more effectively with the humanitarian crisis following the events of Meiktila[129], urged neighbouring Bangladesh to take in the Rohingya not showing any concrete intent of solving the emergence. It looks like the influence of the *sangha* in Burmese politics, far from being over, is nowadays still strong, perhaps more than ever. The fact that Aung San Su Kyi, who opposed the interfaith marriage law but avoided any declaration in regard to the Rohingya crisis, was criticized not to have spoken out enough not to affect the electoral support given by the Buddhist majority to her party contributed to make the issue even more controversial.

[127] Ibidem.

[128] R. Vandenbrink, *Controversial Myanmar Marriage Proposal Gains Two Millions Signatures*, in "Radio Free Asia", 17th July 2013, URL: http://www.rfa.org/english/news/myanmar/interfaith-marriage-07172013194410.html; Z. Mann, S. Micheals, *Petition to Restrict Interfaith Marriage Garners 2.5 Million Signatures in Burma*, in "The Irrawaddy", 18th July 2013, URL: http://www.irrawaddy.org/conflict/petition-to-restrict-interfaith-marriage-garners-2-5-million-signatures-in-burma.html.

[129] The Associated Press, *op. cit.*

Chapter II

"From province of India to Republic of Myanmar"

II.1. British rule, Japanese occupation, regained Independence (1886-1948)

In 1885 Burma fully fell under the British control. The colonial administration, after having flirted for some time with the idea of constituting the newly conquered territory as a protectorate apart, finally declared it to be a province of the Indian Empire[1]. The British used to consider the Burmese as less developed and politically more immature than Indians, prejudice which would contribute along the years to the refusal of conceding the status of dominion and the retardation in granting the final independence.

As Burma became a province of British India, a flood of Indian immigrants (followed by the Chinese) entered the country[2], being generally preferred to the indigenous people as employees in the colonial administrative body, a fact which contributed a lot to the estrangement of the Burmese towards the colonial rule and to the development by them of a xenophobic sentiment against these communities[3]. The Burmese felt usurped in the rights on their land twice, by European invaders and by non-Burmese Asian immigrants, according to what Hagen termed the "doubly colonial society" of British Burma[4]. This caused a guerrilla warfare against the British which was joined or somehow supported by all elements of the society, monks included, and brought the colonial rule, during the four years immediately following the annexation of the country, to use harsh measures in the attempt of controlling the uprising[5].

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[1] M. Htin Aung, *A History of Burma*, New York and London, Columbia University Press, 1967, p. 264.
[2] K. P. Landon, *Nationalism in Southeastern Asia*, in "The Far Eastern Quarterly", 1943, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 139-152, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2049494, p. 144.
[3] Passim, *Ch. I: Ethnicity: Main minority ethnicities: Indians and Chinese.*
[4] E. E. Hagen, *The Economic Development of Burma*, Washington, D.C., National Planning Association, 1956, p. 21.
[5] M. Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, pp. 263-264.

Between 1890 and 1920 Burma lived a peaceful period, especially due to the regained order and the new economic development. Nonetheless, the British rule, neither exposing the people nor their religion to open persecution as it was happening in other colonies in South and Southeast Asia, slowly changed the features of Burmese society. Over the decades nationalism started developing. As in other Asian countries, the expectations towards the liberation from the Western yoke and a consequent Asian resurgence were fomented by the upshot of the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905)[6].

Moreover, as typical of Burmese political culture, nationalist sentiment was enhanced by Buddhism[7] thanks to the activity of various personages and through the occurring of different events. Around 1910 a Buddhist "renaissance" was led by scholars Thingazar Sayadaw and Ledi Sayadaw, further fuelled by increasing contacts between the *sangha* and the monks of Ceylon. As a consequence a Young Men's Buddhist Association –inspired by the already existing YMBA in Ceylon and modelled on the YMCA of the West– was set up with the scope of supporting Buddhism, especially counterpoising the impact of the Christian missions, very successful among the hill-people, and establishing and funding Buddhist schools[8]. Soon after, anyways, the goals of the YMBA acquired political tones.

In 1919 the Government of India Act established the diarchy in the subcontinent but excluded Burma from the reform, considering it was not ready for such a step and still able to benefit from the "India's family of provinces", in order to gain further political development[9].

In December 1920, following a number of labour strikes, a great university strike took place in Rangoon –event considered nationalists' first challenge to British authority– agitating against a University Act Bill which imposed English as the teaching language. The general turmoil had its political outcome in 1921 with the extension of the Government of India Act to Burma[10].

In 1923 the dual government was effectively established, but this did not really fulfilled the aspirations of the Burmese[11]. In this way the altitudes inhabited by minorities were not included in the diarchy. In such a way the Hills remained cast away from what became Ministerial Burma, strengthening divisions which would have contributed to a state of continuous contention and rivalry[12].

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[6] Ivi, p. 277; M. W. Charney, *A History of Modern Burma*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 32.
[7] K. P. Landon, *op. cit.*, p. 141.
[8] M. Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, pp. 277-281; D. I. Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar. What everyone needs to know*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 33-34.
[9] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 34.
[10] M. Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-285.
[11] Ivi, p. 285; M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
[12] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

In 1930, as a consequence of the world economic depression, the price of the rice fell incredibly, leaving almost the totality of the Burmese labourer and cultivator penniless. The general dissatisfaction constituted fertile ground for the rebellion led by the physician and ex-monk Saya San who, preaching the superiority of national culture and the need of chasing the invader, brought the people of the Therrawaddy to create a *galon* army[13] and attack the government outposts[14].

The peasants' rebellion and the problem of the separation from India, which created new divisions among the Burmese barristers[15], produced a vacuum of leadership, of whom young patriots from University of Rangoon took advantage. These students –Ba Sein, Ba Thoung, Lay Maung, Thein Pe Myint– started wearing traditional clothes and singing national songs in the Univeristy, making the prefix "*thakin*" (master) part of their names, a big challenge to British authority given that since 1886 the title *thakin* had been reserved to Englishmen only, like in the case of *sahib* in India[16]. In 1935 they organized a political party called *Dobama Asiayone*, which means "We, the Burmese Confederation", and came to the fore the following year, when a new students' strike shook Rangoon, giving to some of the students leading the protest –among them Aung San– prominence as nationalist leaders[17]. As a consequence of the strike a new generation of leaders was born, more familiar with Western institutions and political tactics to be used against the British[18]. Meanwhile another rebellion had taken place, led by a monk, U Ottama, including the active mobilization of exponents of the *sangha*[19].

In the month of September of the same year the Second World War broke out and two months later the *thakins*, the All Burma Students' Organization and the Sinyetha Party of Ba Maw (one of the most influential barristers), created the Burma Freedom Bloc Organization presided by Aung San, aimed to obtain a deadline for Burmese Independence from London in exchange of Burma's participation in the war. As Churchill refused, the Bloc promoted an anti-war campaign. U Saw, premier from 1940, went to London to personally negotiate with the English statist but again obtained nothing; he got a refusal also from Roosevelt, though he was the father of the

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[13] Saya San extensively used symbols and metaphors belonging to the ancient Burmese mythology; the *galon* was a mythical bird believed to kill the snakes (*nagas*), with which the British were identified. M. Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, p. 291; M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-16; D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

[14] R. L. Solomon, *Saya San and the Burmese Rebellion*, in "Modern Asian Studies", 1969, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 209-223, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/311948.

[15] Burmese advocates of Home Rule, cfr. M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 33. From this group the protagonists of the independence and the future ruling class emerged.

[16] M. Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, p. 295.

[17] J. Silverstein, J. Wohl, *University Students and Politics in Burma*, in "Pacific Affairs", 1964, Vol. 37, No. 1, pp. 50-65, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2754529, p. 52.

[18] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-42.

[19] Ivi, pp. 32-33.

self-determination clause within the Atlantic Charter[20]. Thus, Saw finally offered Burma's alliance to Japan but the British intercepted him. However the Japanese support finally came to Burma through Aung San, although he had initially sought help from the Chinese Communists[21]; as a consequence of the deal with Tokyo, 29 men selected by the *thakin* –known to history as the "thirty Comrades" – were sent to the Japanese-occupied Formosa to receive intensive military training[22].

Aung San sincerely believed Japan would have declared Burma to be an independent state as war against the Allied forces had been declared, but he was wrong. The Empire of the Rising Sun was interested in Burma because of the Burma-China road[23], but the new ally played only a marginal role in the plan which had been disposed for the Asian arena: Burma was only supposed to be a starting gate to enter India, as to the initial expansion plans, destined later to become the western defence wall of Asia, as those plans started collapsing[24]. As a matter of fact, the Japanese occupation of Burma, though very short –only three years (1942-1945)– set up a regime of terror; the occupants killed thousands of Burmese as forced labourers in the construction of the "death railway" which connected Burma to Thailand[25] and impoverished the country[26].

However, as the war between Japan and the Allies was declared, they created a Burma Independence Army headed by the Thirty Comrades and together entered Lower Burma from Thailand, gaining soon the whole country. Then they established a new Army, the Burma Defence Army, officially under General Aung San but in reality controlled by the Japanese generals attached as advisers. As a matter of facts Burma was administrated as an occupied enemy territory[27]. The t*hakins* started claiming for further independence, which the Japanese were not willing to concede, but as the fortune of the war started disadvantaging them, they tried to persuade Burma and other enslaved nations with their conception of a *co-prosperity sphere* within an Asian commonwealth headed by Japan[28]. Burma was declared a sovereign state starting from August 1943, but given the purely formal nature of such a status, Aung San and his faction secretly prepared to mutiny, after having obtained support from the British. This

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[20] K. P. Landon, *op. cit.*, p. 143.
[21] M. Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, pp. 298-300; M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-50.
[22] M. Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, p. 299.
[23] Ivi, p. 300.
[24] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 52.
[25] M. Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, p. 303; C. A. Fisher, *The Thailand-Burma Railway*, in "Economic Geography", 1947, Vol. 23, No. 2, pp. 85-97, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/141316, pp. 86-87.
[26] M. Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, p. 301.
[27] Ivi, pp. 300-301.
[28] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

happened in March 1945 and soon the British gained control over the country, completely destroyed[29] by years of war.

The transition towards independence sped up due to a number of circumstances, namely the sudden end of the war, the outbreak of protests which persuaded the British of the seriousness of the situation and the appointment as prime minister of the labour Attlee, who invited a Burmese delegation to London[30]. The London Agreement or Anglo-Burmese Agreement in January stated Burmese independence and its freedom to decide whether to join or not the Commonwealth[31].

In 1946, from March to April, a meeting between the Burmese and the Frontier Areas leaders was held in Panglong, followed by another one held in the same locality in February 1947, known as *the* Panglong Conference. Surprisingly for Ba Maw and other critics of Aung San, the majority of the representatives decided to join the union, and according to the agreement the areas would have been under the control of the centre for matters of common interest like defence, foreign policy and funding, maintaining at the same time their internal autonomy. The Karens anyways, being their territories less ethnically homogeneous and identifiable and having their delegation split between supporters of the integration with Burma and advocates of an independent state, finally left the conference. Consequently, the Karen National Union (KNU) was born, putting together all those Karens who did not wish to remain part of the newborn state[32]. In this way, in the aftermath of the independence, the issue of eternal ethnic conflicts, far to be solved, soon came back to bite.

In June the Constituent Assembly approved the London Agreement and also, under pressure of the Burmese left wing, resolved to leave the British Commonwealth[33].

The new republic was soon shook again by the assassination of Aung San, together with other fathers of the independence, taking part to a meeting of the Executive Councils. Police soon found proves against U Saw, who was arrested and hanged, but soon the speculation that the homicide was carried out by the British government using Saw as a simple instrument spread out.

After Aung San's death works towards independence proceeded fast: in October 1947 the Anglo-Burmese Treaty stated the terms of relationships between Burma and the United Kingdom and

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[29] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-38.
[30] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-63; M. Htin Aung, *op. cit.*, pp. 304-306.
[31] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
[32] For further analysis about the dynamics of the Panglong Conference and the "myths" developed about it see: M. W. Walton, *Ethnicity, Conflict, and History in Burma: The Myths of Panglong*, in "Asian Survey", 2008, Vol. 48, No. 6, pp. 889-910.
[33] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45.

the Burma Independence Act, approved against strong conservative opposition, made the independence possible to be declared on 4th January 1948[34].

II.2. The AFPFL rule, the Caretaker Government, NE Win's coup (1948-1962)

Aung San's charisma, together with the common ideology of Marxist inspiration, was the only element able to keep the AFPFL united, so that as the latter disappeared, the alliance soon broke[35]; In addition to this, Aung San was the only Burmese leader, along with few other fathers of the independence, to be trusted by the minorities including the Karens[36], and the lack of his prestige was determinant to the detachment of these from the national unity project and the emergence of the Karen revolution.

After Aung San's death however, *Thankin* Nu[37] was invited by Attlee to form a new government immediately after the assassination of Aung San; Nu –dismissed the "militant" title of *thakin* and reacquired the civilian one of *U* to show that the struggle was finally over[38]– tried to deal with the problem of the ongoing civil war.

The Burmese Communist Party (BCP) had already split into two factions, the so-called "White Flags" under Than Tun and the "Red Flags" under *thakin* Soe[39]. Nu tried to re-include the BCP in the AFPFL but his attempt was unsuccessful due to the impossibility of getting to a deal with the leadership of the party, which consequently started the insurgency.

Soon after, beside these ideological conflicts, major ethnic rebellions broke out as the government refused the demand for independence to a Karen-Mon State claimed by two Mon separatist groups and the KNU, whose armed wing, the Karen National Defence Organization (KNDO)[40], became one of the most durable ethnic forces facing the authority of Rangoon[41]. Following the early advances of the rebel groups, Ne Win, as new commander of the Army since 1949, started a dramatic empowerment of the armed forces so that the country was under martial law during the period from 1948 to 1950, which was one the most terrible time for the government in the attempt of resolving the civil war. Moreover in 1949 and 1950 the Shan States

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[34] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.
[35] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
[36] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 42.
[37] L. J. Walinsky, *The Rise and Fall of U Nu*, in "Pacific Affairs", 1966, Vol. 38, No. 3/4, pp. 269-281, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2754031; H. Tinker, *Nu, the Serene Statesman*, in "Pacific Affairs", 1957, Vol. 30, No. 2, pp. 120-137, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2752684.
[38] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 85.
[39] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 43.
[40] Ivi, pp. 126-27.
[41] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

were partly invaded by the KNDO in its fight with the government and also by militias belonging to the Guomindang (GMD).

The GMD had first entered the state from Yunnan in 1950, being defeated by the Chinese Communists forces, and remained there, supported by Taiwan and the CIA, getting soon involved in the opium trafficking[42]; in this way, it represented for long time an important variable for the determination of the delicate position of Burma in the international arena, with respect to China and to the Cold War in general.

From the point of view of its foreign policy, the Nu government promoted a position of strict neutrality in international affairs: it resisted to the US attempts of mobilizing the Burmese against the Communists and at the same time reduced the risk of a PRC intervention against the GMD stationed on Myanmarese soil[43]. Nu declined the invitation to join the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) offered by Eisenhower, especially not to provoke a Chinese intervention. At the same time he affirmed his neutralism also with respect to the Non-Alligned Movement, preventing Burma from taking the side of any bloc, even the neutralist one[44].

The government followed a hard time also in economic matters, trying to promote for the first time socialism in the country. Since during the British era a small number of foreign capitalists dominated Burmese economy, U Nu started nationalizing their concerns. Moreover, he promoted measures to control the flight of capitals from the country, particularly to India, and supported the emergence of an autochthonous business class. In 1950 the *Pyudawtha* ("pleasant country") plan was open, moderately socialist in inspiration and consisting in a series of government-directed development plans aimed to the creation of the welfare state[45]. The first one, of the length of eight years and inaugurated in 1952, was initially successful but, as a consequence of the end of the Korean war, the price of the rice, which was Burmese main export, fell dramatically. U Nu had to look for alternative sources of sustainment, signing in 1954 a peace

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[42] «One of the major effects of the Kuomintang incursion was the spread of opium production in that region. As a mean to sustain and arm itself, the troops remaining in Burma encouraged the growth of the opium poppy, its conversion into heroin, and its export, which in that period occurred mainly through Thailand. Although opium production has been encouraged by the British and taxed by local chieftains (*sawbwas*, *maharajas*), before independence it was a local (not international) problem, and its use seemed largely restricted to the Chinese minority in the region. The Caretaker Government (1958-1960) abolished the legal production and sale of opium», D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

[43] J. Seabury, *Burmese Neutralism*, in "Political Science Quarterly", 1957, Vol. 72, No. 2, pp. 261-283, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2145776, pp. 262-266.

[44] F. N. Trager, *Burma's Foreign Policy, 1948-56: Neutralism, Third Force, and Rice*, in "The Journal of Asian Studies", 1956, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 89-102, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2941548; E. W. Martin, *Burma in 1975: New Dimensions to Non-Alignmen*t, in "Asian Survey", 1976, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 173-177, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2643145.

[45] H. Tinker, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

treaty with Japan which included reparations, and exchanging in 1955 rice supply for Soviet aid to development[46].

A new reinforcement of police and military activity occurred in April 1956. The AFPFL won the election proposing the continuation of the state policies and overrunning the opponent National United Front (NUF), which instead run on the pledge of an immediate peace negotiation with the rebels. Nu temporarily left the role of premier to focus on his work as president of the AFPFL and reorganize the league, while Ba Swe, who temporarily took his place, increased the activity of paramilitary brigades, promoted campaigns to improve the nation's moral and reduce corruption. Nu finally resumed his office in June 1957.

Another characterizing element of Nu's years was the strong relationship between Buddhism and the state. As a matter of facts, monks had created a strong lobby and in 1947 some monastic orders pushed for the designation of Buddhism as the state religion justifying their claim with the fact that over 80% of the Myanmarese population was effectively Buddhist. Nu on his turn believed that promoting Buddhism was a way to prevent a Communist drift and that since a strong element of the society was asking for that, rejecting the demand would have boosted religious extremism. A sequence of reforms followed, among others the *Vinasaya Act* which registered all monks and created ecclesiastical tribunals, the *Pali University and Dhammacariya Act*, the *Buddha Sasana Council Act*, the *Pali Education Board Act*. A renewed pressure from the *sangha* to elevate Buddhism to the level of state religion immediately followed, but the awaited proclamation was delayed.

In 1958 the unity of the league leading the government broke, revealing dissidence and rivalry in its internal; it split into two factions, the "Clean" faction led by U Nu and *thakin* Tin, and the "Stable" faction headed by Kyaw Nyein and Ba Swe[47]. The clash between the two groups progressively escalated, various murders between their exponents being reported; in the middle of the crisis U Nu left on a tour of Upper Burma, while the army, acting upon his return, occupied the strategic points in Rangoon and Insein. As U Nu returned, he received high chiefs of the Army warning him about the possible attack from the Clean faction, so finally the ex-*thakin* agreed to resign his mandate and consign the premiership to a "Caretaker" government under the leadership of Ne Win to administrate the country in status of emergency for six months.

[46] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
[47] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

Nu announced the Caretaker Government of Ne Win on the 24th September 1958, explaining that he himself had invited the general to make it possible to hold free elections within six months and appealing all the population to support him. Nonetheless, U Nu stressed that the army should not get involved in politics beyond the measure required by its administrative duty and that the country should maintain its neutral trend in the conduction of foreign affairs. It was not easy for the citizen to accept that what had occurred was not a coup and before it happened students and various political groups protested against the transition.

The targets of the Caretaker Government were bureaucratic inefficiency, corruption, moral decadence; with the so-called *sweat campaigns* and *operation clean-up* they tried to promote civic awareness and politeness and eliminate from the streets of the capital dirt, stray animals, pornographic material and also anti-aesthetic traditional habits like betel chewing[48]. They also eliminated the autonomy of the Shan *sawbwas* and made the opium production illegal[49].

In February 1959, at the end of the six months, the Ne Win Caretaker Government resigned stating it was impossible to hold free and fair elections the following month, as its mandate initially required, and that to make it possible it needed more time to deal with the insurgency. The constitution was amended to allow him to remain in power until 1960. At the time of the elections, in February 1960, thanks to his prestige among the Buddhist electorate given by the promise of making Buddhism the state religion and by the adoption of saffron as the colour of the campaign, Nu's Clean AFPFL won[50]. Immediately he reorganized the party, renamed *Pyidaungsu Party* (i.e. the Union Party) around popular principles and adopted a two-cabinets government, being one cabinet destined to the Union and the other to the states. The return to civilian rule however was not destined to be long-lasting due to difficulties arisen with respect to: the ethnic minorities and their adhesion to the Union, the consequence of this on the Army's endorsement of Nu's position, the Buddhist question and, finally, unsuccessful economic policies. In June 1961 at the Conference of States held at Taunggyi, capital of the Shan States, federalism was the option which had the upper hand, producing dissatisfaction among the Karen, Chin and Kachin claiming independent states. In addition to this, critics were addressed to the government, first of all by the Army, because Nu's availability to negotiations with respect to the separatist minorities was seen as a threat to the national unity[51].

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[48] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98.
[49] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 55.
[50] L. S. Bigelow, *The 1960 Election in Burma*, in "Far Eastern Survey", 1960, Vol. 29, No. 5, pp. 70-74, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3024046, p. 71.
[51] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

The Buddhist question undermined the basis of the civilian power as well, causing great protests. Elected on the pledge of making Buddhism the state religion and strained by the renewed pressure of the Buddhist electorate, Nu finally proceeded to the awaited reform submitting the *Constitution Amendment Bill* to Parliament. The *State Religion Act* was finally promulgated in August 1961 and, as a consequence, the Burmese state became responsible for maintaining, protecting and promoting the religion through consultations, constructions and restorations, and state-funded universities, examinations and provisions[52]. A wave of religious violence followed, involving the Hindu community and the Muslim one; against them militants monks arose, ending up in setting fire to a number of mosques.

The Army, who had tasted power during the Caretaker Government, assisted thus to Nu's incompetent administration[53]. Having opposed Nu's Buddhist campaign and seeing the preservation of the union in danger, a coup was considered to be the solution for safeguarding the country[54].

II.3. Ne Win and the Burmese Way to Socialism (1962-1988)

The coup acted by the armed forces occurred on the 2nd March 1962 and, on the same day, the creation of a military government by a Revolutionary Council headed by general Ne Win followed. Soon the new government dissolved the Parliament as well as the state councils as well.

The author of the putsch, Ne Win, at the moment of the coup Commander in Chief of the Burmese Army, was a general of Sino-Burman descent whose influence on Burmese politics would have extended for more than twenty-five years, until the end of its power in 1988 and beyond.

Educated in the University of Rangoon during the Thirties, he was later one of the Thirty Comrades chosen by Aung San to receive training from the Japanese and lead the mutiny against the British; during the AFPFL government he was Ministry of Defence and, as a consequence of the coup of 1962, commander of the Army, Chairman of the Revolutionary Council at power and of the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) (until 1981)[55].

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[52] Ivi, p. 104.
[53] R. Butwell, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-10.
[54] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.
[55] Ivi, p. 74.

Historians still discuss the reasons which brought him and the military to forcibly seize power; according to what the Revolutionary Council itself declared immediately after the coup in the person of Aung Gyi, the main motivation was concern about the preservation of the national unity; given the dangerous understanding of the Nu government towards the federalist demand by the Shan leaders, the military were afraid that, if it happened, Burma would have slipped in a void of problems similar to those faced by Laos and Vietnam[56]. Beside the preoccupation of maintaining a unitary state, the Council expressed dissatisfaction towards Nu's management of the political agenda and proposed a new programme based on three points: development of agriculture, freedom of religion and separation of this from politics –in open contrast to the last pro-Buddhist period of Nu's rule- and freedom of press[57]. Unfortunately, over a period it would have revealed not to be able to realize any of these programmed developments.

The political and economical failure of Ne Win' period was due to the chronic weaknesses of Burmese politics which had already come out during U Nu's time and stayed unresolved also under the military rule: ethnic insurgency, economical stagnation and the factionalism which soon affected Ne Win's front as well as; but it was also affected by a certain visionary and irresponsible style in conducing public affairs, in great part given by an over-sensitivity to occultism and astrology to which the general was devoted, typical feature of authoritarian personalities[58]. The military always adduced the concern towards chaos as a justification to intervene, ending up, perhaps, to cause that chaos itself in order to have a reason to act, like in 1988; however, some observed that the real threat for the armed forces headed by the general was, in reality, «the attrition or destruction of the military's role in society»[59].

The transformation of the country in a single-party state would have ensured, according to the Revolutionary Council, the avoidance of the internal disintegration of the political forces which affected Nu's period, finally determining its end. As a consequence, the Council created in July the Burmese Way to Socialism Party (BWSP, later known as BSPP), promising that since the

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[56] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 108.
[57] Ivi, pp. 108-109.
[58] Cfr. D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 74-75: «Ne Win's influence is important not only for the roles he played but because of his disastrous policies or those carried out in his name. He was highly mercurial, and his whims became command, policy, and law. He could not be contradicted. He changed the currency into multiples of nine, his lucky number, which was astrologically assured to enable him to live to be ninety. He changed traffic from the left to the right side of the road (on the advice of an astrologer) to ensure his success. In his later years he built a pagoda even though he was against making Buddhism the state religion. […] One future question is: how generic is the Ne Win style of administration? Some believe that Senior General Than Shwe is exhibiting all the same traits of Ne Win, and one issue is whether this type of leadership […] is virtually inherent in the political culture of Burma/Myanmar and reminiscent of the power of the Burmese kings; whether this is some singular aberrations; whether this is inherent in the Burmese military command structure; or whether the actions of the leadership are fostered by their followers. »
[59] Ivi, p. 80.

real nature of the Council was a revolutionary one and it had to assume the junta's role only because of historical necessity, soon it would have grown into a mass party shaped around the democratic centralism principle. At the same time, the process of dissolution of all the other political parties started (the main "opponents" of the BSPP were the AFPFL, the *Pyidaungsu Party* of Nu and the Burma Workers Unity Party, formerly NUF)[60]. A similar purge applied to the press, all the private newspapers and foreign news source being blocked and journalists being trained according to the new socialist spirit[61].

The new course was made explicit by the publication in January 1963 of *The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment*, the manifesto of the new party ideology[62], whose doctrine was a mix of Socialism –even though often deviationist with respect to the Marxist orthodoxy– Buddhism, Humanism and other various thoughts, and became soon a compulsory textbook in the training of civil servants[63]. The promotion of the new ideology had also the scope of emancipating Burma from foreign influence, especially the Chinese[64].

The government tried to extend its control over the two most militant elements of Burmese society, students and monks. The most important event in these terms, usually remembered by historians as a great misstep by the general, was the blowing of the Rangoon University Student Union building, symbol of Burma's independence movement, as a consequence of the students' riot broken out after the first forced closure of the institution in 1962[65]. As of the monks, given that the junta came to power on the pledge of the contestation of Nu's discriminatory Buddhist policy, the abolition of the *Buddha Sasana Council* was ordered in 1962. Two years later anyway the general proposed the creation of the *Buddha Sasana Sangha Organization* (BSSO) aimed to act as unitary organizational body of the *sangha* and which tried to impose, but in vain, the compulsory registration for each monk. The regime would have been able to finally obtain this in 1979, with the establishment of the *Sangha Maha Nayaka*. During Ne Win's period also there was a certain connivance between the political power and the religious one: the junta seemed to prefer the *Shwegyin Sangha*, more conservative as a monastic order when compared to the *Thudhamma* one, which had got the better under Nu, finally obtaining the proclamation of the

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[60] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 110.
[61] Ivi, pp. 111-113.
[62] R. von der Mehden, *The Burmese Way to Socialism*, in "Asian Survey", 1963, Vol. 3, No. 3, pp. 129-135, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3023620.
[63] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 64-65.
[64] R. A. Holmes, *Burma's Foreign Policy Toward China Since 1962*, in "Pacific Affairs", 1972, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 240-254, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2755554, pp. 247-248.
[65] J. Silverstein, *Students in Southeast Asian Politics*, in "Pacific Affairs", 1976, Vol. 49, No. 2, pp. 189-212, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2756065, p. 196.

creed as official religion of the state[66]. The mingling of religious and political power was evident also in Ne Win's drawing, in quality of ruler, to the ancient narrative of the Burmese king[67]: the purification of the *sangha* through the *All-Sangha All-Sect Convention* in 1980[68], always followed by a typical amnesty, and the building of pagodas can be interpreted in this perspective[69].

Under the economical point of view the military junta embarked in the job of developing the country repairing the damages of the former government, and its policies showed different phases of evolution. Initially the main influence in economic matters was acted by Aung Guyi, already economic hero of the Caretaker Government, who belonged to the so called *Paungde group*, characterized by favouring industrialization and a moderate approach to nationalization. As head of the Ministry of Industries, he emphasized the Import Substitution Industrialization model which had already been initiated in the Caretaker period. By the end of 1962 Tin Pe, known as "the Red Brigadier" for its pure Marxism, came to the fore. In the initial years the government embarked in a number of project aimed to increase agricultural productivity. After the publication of the ideological *manifesto* of the BSPP in 1963 anyways, also the economy suffered a more radical shift: Aung Guyi was pushed out of the way and the Burmese economy was subject to a quick Marxist transformation, with Tin Pe finally becoming Chairman of the Finance Committee of the Council in 1964[70]. At the end of 1965, however, Ne Win in person had to admit the terrible situation of the national economy, in a country that, used to be the first world exporter of rice, was now at risk of starvation, as consequence of the decline of the exportable rice surplus due to mismanaging by the government over the price of the good[71].

Another eternal problem that the junta had to face was the one of the insurgencies on many fronts. In April 1963 it announced that he would have offered an amnesty to the rebels willing to depose their weapons and, in order to ensure that the opposition did not undermine the peace talks, proceeded to the arrest of the central leadership of the AFPFL. Though, the conditions proposed by Ne Win did not satisfy the rebels, so that many abandoned the negotiation[72].

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[66] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 116.
[67] M. Maung, *The Burma Road to the Past*, in "Asian Survey", 1999, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp. 265-286, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2645455, pp. 266-270.
[68] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 139-140.
[69] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 71; M. Maung, *op.cit.*, pp. 275-276; D. M. Seekins, *The State and the City: 1988 and the Transformation of Rangoon*, in "Pacific Affairs", 2005, Vol. 78, No. 2, pp. 257-275, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40023916, pp. 273-274.
[70] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123.
[71] Ivi, pp. 124-125.
[72] Ibidem.

Within the rebels problem, a big issue was still represented by the Communists: influenced, as common to many communist and socialist parties of the time, by the evolution of the relations between the USSR and the PRC, the Communists had split in *Burmese Communist Party* (BCP) and *Communist Party of Burma* (CPB), being especially the first one the most serious challenger for the central government. As aforementioned, Nu was good enough to maintain a strictly neutral line in the conduction of foreign affairs[73] so that the PRC did not become involved with the two Communist insurgencies during the years of Burmese civilian rule. Moreover, after Bandung, willing to present itself as a champion of neutralism, the PRC renounced to build a relation with the Communists of Myanmar. In 1962 however the PRC changed its policy after Ne Win seized power, encouraging both the CPB and the BCP to join the peace talks with the new government[74]. Nevertheless the negotiations failed with both the groups and the gap separating Rangoon and Beijing deepened as the Council built closer relations with the USSR: this brought the PRC to label Burma as a reactionary country and to start a consistent even though not open support of the Communist insurgency in Myanmar[75]. Aware of this and further alarmed by the possibility that the country got infected by the recent Cultural Revolution, the relations between the two government worsen[76]; the decline finally culminated in the anti-Chinese riots of 1966[77], which had their consequent equivalent in the anti-Burmese riots following in China[78].

In the mid-Sixties Ne Win started realizing that the shift to a military rule had not been well accepted by the people in general, so he decided it was necessary to give to the junta a civilian face. This was done first of all by the transformation of the BSPP in a people's party, as it was actually promised at the moment of its creation. At the second congress of the party, the BSPP approved a draft constitution transforming Myanmar in a single-party socialist state called *Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma*.

In January 1974 elections for the Assembly were held, though the BSPP was the only party allowed to run. In this occasion the military rule had official –though formal and not substantial–

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[73] J. Silverstein, *Burma in 1981: The Changing of the Guardians Begins*, in "Asian Survey", 1982, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 180-190, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2643945, pp. 188-189.
[74] Ivi, p. 183.
[75] E. W. Martin, *op.cit.*, pp. 174-175.
[76] R. A. Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 245.
[77] J. H. Badgley, *Burma's China Crisis: The Choices Ahead*, in "Asian Survey", 1967, Vol. 7, No. 11, pp. 753-761, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2642500; J. Silverstein, *Students in…*, cit., pp. 196-197.
[78] P. Fistié, *La Birmanie ou la quê de l'unité. Le problème dela cohésion nationale dans la Birmanie contemporaine et sa perspective historique*, Paris, École Française d'Etrême-Orient, 1985, pp. 344-345.

ending as Ne Win resigned power in advantage of the Assembly. Not surprisingly however, this one soon after elected him as the President of the State Council i.e. head of the country[79].

The "demilitarization" of the government continued also in the economic field with the decadence of Tin Pe to the advantage of the formerly disqualified Aung Gyi. In 1973 the government decontrolled the trade market and suspended the export of rice, which caused the doubling of the national price of the good. The situation further worsened due to terrible floods, the outbreak of cholera epidemic and new students' and monks' riot following the return in Rangoon of the corpse of the former UN Secretary General U Thant, recently died in New York[80]; as a consequence in June the government closed the Universities again, established the martial law over the capital city for more than one year[81], and finally extended its control over the *sangha* at the aforementioned All-Sangha All-Sect Convention of 1980[82].

In 1976 Ne Win discovered a coup plot planned to assassinate him and other cadres of the party so that at the third BSPP Congress in advance in February 1977 he proceeded to purge the party eliminating the so called *Gang of 113*. At the next Congress held in August 1981 he announced his decision to abandon the chair of President of the Republic but this did not prevent him to keep a firm control on the country as he kept his authority over the state party until 1988.

In 1981 a new forthcoming law citizenship, highly discriminatory of those who did not have "pure Burmese blood", was announced: an expression of the dormant xenophobic sentiment developed by the Burmese during the colonial rule on one hand, and an extreme attempt of boosting national economical renaissance on the other. According to the law three categories of citizens come into existence: the genuine citizens were pure blood nationals, enjoying a status which could not be revoked and which enabled them to be elected for public posts; the "resident citizens" or "associate citizens" in turn were those immigrants, mainly Chinese and Indians, who had settled in Burma and applied for citizenship under the 1948 laws; this status did not admit dual citizenship and could be revoked in case of unmoral or disloyal conduct with respect to national affairs or interests; finally, the "naturalized citizens", in great part belonging to the aforesaid two communities as well, were pre-1948 immigrants who did not apply for citizenship. Many considered this law as a way to disadvantage non-Asian immigrants' enrichment and upliftment in the country, given that in such a way they were denied any option of assuming

[79] Ivi, p. 136.
[80] D. M. Seekins, *op. cit.*, pp. 259-260.
[81] J. Silverstein, *Students in...*, cit., p. 197.
[82] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-139.

official power, which was possible only for those enjoying the full citizenship[83]. The other two groups indeed «could not be given bureaucratic or military position, could not vote and were denied higher education»[84]. The most affected group was the Rohingya to whom any level of citizenship was denied, creating the basis of a persecution which continues still today.

Ne Win's period finished with the final crackdown of Burmese economy: after forming a special consortium for consultation on the Burmese question within the World Bank, countries like Japan, West Germany, but also PRC, started donating aid since the end of the Seventies; nevertheless, this did not prevent the economy to further worsen, and a new liberalization of the rice trade was launched by the general in 1987, but in vain. During the same year the situation became more critical after an unpopular demonetization of the *kyat*[85], followed by the usual students' protests. At the end of 1987 the situation bottomed out and Burma was given status of *Least Developed Country* by the UN[86], thanks to which the country should have been enabled to receive highly subsidized loans. Significantly such a status, for whose obtainment Burma had to lobby since its literacy level was too high to meet the objective criteria, was not announced by the regime to the Burmese people.

II.4. The military rule of the SLORC/SPDC and the fight for democracy (1988-present)

The end of Ne Win's era started with the so called *1988 popular revolution*, which developed from relatively accidental events. Riots progressively spread and turmoil reached its peak in the sadly famous *incident of the White Bridge* in Rangoon, were students demonstrating against the one-party state were beaten to death and gang raped by the armed forces, the government refusing at that time and also in future any responsibility for the event. In response, the general closed the universities once again and declared the martial law over the capital city. Aung Gyi expressed all its disagreement towards the management of the emergence by the government in a letter in which he indicated in Ne Win's economical policies the reason of national decline. Predictably, he was consequently arrested. Violence broke out again in various cities. In an extraordinary congress of the party in July 1988 U Aye Ko, in quality of General Secretary of the BSPP, admitted the failure of government's economical policy and expressed the intention of going back to an open economy so to create the conditions to increase investments in the

[83] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.
[84] Ibidem.
[85] Ivi, p. 76.
[86] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 146. Cfr: UNDESA, *Least Developed Coutries: LDC Fact Sheet*, URL: http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/cdp/ldc/profile/country_129.shtml.

country, which were what Burma needed more for rising again. In addition to this, since in Ne Win's mind the bloody clashes of March and June proved that people did not trust the government, the general asked the congress to approve the proposal of holding a national referendum to decide whether Burma should remain a single-party state or shift to multipartism. In the second case, he asked to be allowed to resign from his role of Chairman of the party (full member indeed had no option of resigning and it would have required a change of party regulations). The Congress ended with the acceptance of an eventual resignation by Ne Win but with no possibility of leaving the party.

At the tenth meeting of the BSPP Central Committee Sein Lwin was appointed Chairman of the party and became as a consequence President of the country. A staunch believer in the Burmese Way to Socialism known as "the butcher of Rangoon" for his previous management of revolts, students started protesting as he came to power. Since monks joined the protests, in August the government tried to ensure the support of the State *Sangha Maha Nayaka Committee* and the *Sangha Nayaka* committees through a number of agreements aimed to make sure they would not have allowed the monks to participate in the rioting. However, since violence escalated, the *State Snagha Naha Nayaka Committee* itself urged the government to respect the *dasa raja dhamma* and make concession to the people. In response, the Army entered Rangoon and built barricades to prevent the movement of demonstrators within the city; soon after Sein Lwin resigned from all his charges and was replaced by Dr. Maung Maung.

Though people did not like the choice of Maung Maung because of the close relationship he had with Ne Win, immediately he demonstrated to have a different approach to the situation, making various concessions to the demonstrators, including a referendum about the future of Burmese one-party system. The measures, however, did not placate the riots. While the numbers of people joining the protest against the military rule was quickly growing, the personality of Aung San Su Kyi as new point of reference and eventually leader of the growing movement for democracy started coming out. Although, according to her declaration, at that time she felt she was still acting simply as a "kind of unifying force", protestors began recognizing her as the new guide in the fight against the generals, especially after the famous speech she gave at the Shwedagon Pagoda in August.

In September another emergency congress of the BSPP was held: aim of the meeting was voting with regard to a national referendum, as it had already been promised more than once since time. The great majority of the delegates however voted against the referendum and in favour of a

multi-party general election[87]. In the while, Nu, returned to Burma in 1980 under amnesty, was preparing his political return; the old man put himself at the head of a group of former politicians and leaders of his era and announced the creation of a parallel government[88]. On the other side, the leaders of the new pro-democracy movement who would have later resulted in the National League of Democracy (NLD)[89], rejected the proposed multi-party election due to a number of reasons.

Meanwhile the chaos increased due to the persistent strike of the government employees, fomented in their boycott by Su Kyi, and the progressive internal disintegration of the armed forces, less and less effective in facing the protestors.

On the 18th September 1988 Maung Maung was overturned by a coup acted by Saw Maung, whose closeness to Ne Win brought many to consider it as a fake putsch. Immediately the new military government imposed the end of the strike and the curfew, stated that every association or demonstration would have been treated as a crime and ordered the shooting of those who resisted[90].

The group headed by Saw Maung who staged the coup was initially named Organization for Building Law and Order in the State, soon changed in *State Law and Order Restoration Council* (SLORC)[91]. The agenda of the SLORC was further detailed in four points: law and order; transport; food, clothing and shelter; democratic multi-party elections. Order, first of all, was to be established through the easy application of martial law. At the same time, in the perspective of achieving the fourth and final goal, the SLORC set the condition for a multi-party system with the *Political Parties Registration Law*[92], which required all those formation wishing to run for the elections to be recorded by the Election Committee.

Meanwhile in October 1988 the SLORC passed the *Law on the Substitution of Terms*, which renamed the country and the highest offices of the state; "Socialist Republic of the Union of Buma" was replaced "Union of Burma"[93]. Less than one year later, this reform would be completed by a two more regulations of the toponyms. In May the Council abolished the name "Burma" because derived from "Bama", meaning "Burman" in Burmese language, and therefore considered to be discriminatory of ethnic minorities; as a consequence, it was substituted with "Myanma", so that the new official name of the country became "Union of Myanma" (later

[87] Ivi, p. 156.
[88] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-88.
[89] Ibidem.
[90] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-160.
[91] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 82.
[92] Ivi, p. 87.
[93] Ivi, p. 171.

amended in Myanmar to recreate in English the particular intonation of the final syllable)[94]. In June the *Adaptation of Expressions Law*, aimed to modify the English names referring to Burmese people and places in order to make them more similar to the effective Burmese pronunciation. Behind this measure, a sort of symbolic re-appropriation of the country, there was the attempt of the junta of gaining consensus among the population in accordance to its typical hostility to foreign influence[95].

In February 1989 the Election Law Drafting Committee declared that election were to be held in May 1990, the precise date (27th May) being declared only in November. According to the draft *Election Law* all government employees, members of army and police, monks, ethnic rebels, foreigners were excluded from the active electorate; however, at the same time, the SLORC tried to guarantee that civilian servants supported the government or at least did not support the opposition by raising their salary and imposing to teachers not to get involved in political affairs[96].

As the organization of the forthcoming election was progressing, the main political parties running for them were finalizing their reshape. The most important transformation regarded the BSPP, which was officially dissolved but actually subjected to a cosmetic change. In September it was granted permission to both military and civilian members to resign from the party and all the properties of the former BSPP started being moved to the new *National Unity Party* (NUP).

At the same time, Nu had organized his allies in a party called *League for Democracy and Peace* (LDP); although it was the first party produced by the anti-government movement given the composition of the line-up it failed to gain support among the youth[97].

In the same period the abovementioned leaders of the pro-democracy movement formed the *National United Front for Democracy*, soon renamed as *National League for Democracy* (NLD)[98], being Aung San Suu Kyi the General Secretary, Tin U the Vice Chairman and Aung Gyi the Chairman. During the electoral campaign Tin U and Suu Kyi faced numerous intervention of the SLORC aimed to discourage their activity and disqualify them in the eyes of the masses. In front of Suu Kyi's perseverance, the government started claiming she was a danger for public order and an instigator of turmoil and distrust towards the State and the Army. On July 20th both she and Tin U were placed under house arrest, followed by the arrest of 2,000-

[94] G. Houtman, *Mental culture in Burmese crisis politics*, London, Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1999, p. 43-47.
[95] Ivi, pp. 171-173.
[96] Ivi, pp. 164-165.
[97] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 165.
[98] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

6,000 members of the League. In its attempt of undermine the League's appeal, the SLORC started a propaganda campaign based on the association of Suu Kyi and the NLD with the BCP and foreign elements[99].

In addition to this, to extend its control over the pre-election phase, the junta allowed military trials to exercise summary trials; started a campaign for issuing citizenship cards for the check-in of the voters and, taking advantage of this to control the citizenship of political candidates, it started claiming the ineligibility both of Aung Gyi, who had a partly Chinese descent, and of Suu Kyi, because married to a western. Not even obstructing NLD rallies and imprisoning its representatives the SLORC could secure its victory. The awaited election were held on the 16th June 1990 and the NLD won 392 seats out of 447. The SLORC, expecting a victory for the NUP, initially complained about the validity of the balloting, not really an intelligent move given that the SLORC itself was responsible for ensuring the legitimacy of the voting.

In front of the overwhelming victory reported by the League, the SLORC, not to transfer power to the NLD, suddenly changed what had been its position towards the election until the release of the results. In April indeed, little time before the election, when the Council was still sure it would have reported a landline victory over Aung San Su Kyi, the SLORC declared three of the four programmatic points achieved, only the election still to be fulfilled. After the publication of the results on the contrary, Saw Maung declared that the elections had been the only task the SLORC had realized, still remaining all the other ones[100]. Evidently not willing to resign in favour of the League, the Council started to de-democratizing Myanmar from June, violently repressing every expression of popular discontent, like in the clash between the Army and monks in Mandalay in August[101]. At the same time, it emphasized its anti-Suu Kyi propaganda stressing her Western background and her being a female, both features absolutely contrary to Burmese traditional political culture. In 1991 Suu Skyi received two important honours, the Sakhov Prize for Human Rights and the Nobel Peace Prize, which helped to draw attention on the struggle for freedom and democracy that Myanmar was fighting. However, the SLORC used the events to reinforce its prejudice towards Suu Kyi's dangerous links with foreign powers.

At the beginning of 1992 Saw Maung began showing evident symptoms of mental illness[102]. As a consequence his two most powerful deputies, Khin Nyunt and Than Shwe, competed for replacing him. Than Shwe won the competition, becoming initially Chief of the Army and then,

[99] Ivi, p. 167.
[100] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
[101] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 174.
[102] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

in April, also Chairman of the SLORC and, consequently, premier. His first scope was restoring internal security, so that he inaugurated a season of negotiation with the ethnic rebels, aimed to reach ceasefire agreements. After its collapse in 1989, great part of the BCP had transformed into ethnic armies. Between 1989 and 1990 the government created ceasefire agreements permitting the rebels to keep their weapons and control their areas, exploiting them economically, leaving the political arrangement to the post-constitutional era. Of course they should not engage in actions against Rangoon and their activity could not include the opium production[103]. Most of the groups agreed to ceasefires between 1993 and 1995; after the great number of the agreements had been signed, the government reorganized the ethnicities of the country identifying 135 "officially recognized" groups[104]. These policies enabled the BCP, with a certain amount of plausibility, to claim to be the administration who better managed the ethnic issue in the recent history of the country.

At the same time, he started a process of re-education of the teachers, considered responsible of the turbulence of the students, who demonstrated to be the strongest militant power in opposing the government. The government set up a re-education camp, the *Central Institute of public Services*, inspired by those built by the Red Guards during the Chinese Cultural Revolution.

In the attempt of improving Myanmar's international prestige, the SLORC embarked in a number of "reforms" regarding the Council itself, the opposition, its domestic and its foreign policy. With regard to the domestic rule, the government put an end to the martial law, released a good number of political prisoners and allowed Suu Kyi, still under house arrest, to receive visit of her family. In terms of foreign policy it tried to uplift its image by rejoining the Non-Aligned Movement, signing four articles of the Geneva Convention and hosting a Convention of the Colombo Plan in the capital city. The biggest change however arrived in 1997 when the SLORC was abolished and replaced by the *State Peace Development Council* (SPDC). Still today it is discussed which has been the real reason for the junta to make such a change, given that it revealed to be more formal than substantial, bringing many scholars to refer to the "SLORC/SPDC" as one single period. Finally, the explication which appears most probable is to link the reform to the necessity of new respectability aimed to the admission in ASEAN: since Myanmar was preparing to get its membership in 1997, the "cosmetic change"[105] was decided. Also the purge acted in March 2002 has been seen as a move to please ASEAN by removing the

[103] Ivi, p. 111.
[104] Passim, *Ch. I: Ethnicity: Definition of Ethnicity in Myanmar*.
[105] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

corrupted Ne Win's old guard (which had continuously exercised its influence during the SLORC era).

Though the two institutions show strong similarities based on the communal military and authoritarian characterization of their power, there are some differences. One of the peculiarity of the SPDC has been the concentration of power in a small minority at the top, constituted by four generals: Than Shwe, Maung Aye, Khin Nyunt and Tin Oo (dead in 2001)[106]. Khin Nyunt and Maung Aye especially competed with each other to affirm their authority on the organization; finally Khin Nyunt prevailed becoming prime minister in August 2003. He was brought down by a purge in 2004 that "although clearly the result of Khin Nyunt's long political rivalry with Maung Aye […] was characterized as a move by the SPDC to eradicate corruption[107], because of his numerous smuggling crimes"[108]. Under the economic point of view the SPDC, initially enjoyed the benefits of the investments following the liberalization of trade and the investment-friendly policies adopted by the SLORC starting from November 1989[109]. Foreign companies, especially Japanese, South Korean, Western, Taiwanese and American quickly entered the re-opened Burmese market, as Myanmar appeared as a source of cheap labour and a virgin market for the placement of their products. In the mid-Nineties Western companies practiced a first boycott following Aung San Suu Kyi's admonishment of June 1989, in which the leader of the NLD censured them for doing business in Myanmar given the violation of human rights perpetrated by the Burmese government. The boycott, however, did not really impact the country since the space left by the Western investors was quickly occupied by companies within the ASEAN. As a consequence, foreign investments kept giving the SLORC "an economic lifeline"[110] thanks to the policy of appeasement towards Burma played by the ASEAN.

The neutral attitude of the organization towards the country changes as the humanitarian issue also started representing a potential destabilizing factor in the area of its concern. The persecution led by the government against the Arakanese Muslims called Rohingyas[111], cause of a flood of refugees in the neighbouring Bangladesh, and the incursion of Myanmar army in Thai territory as a consequence of attacks led against the KNU. As a consequence of increasing ASEAN concern, the SLORC decided the move on the transformation in SPDC. In January

[106] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
[107] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 181.
[108] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, p. 131.
[109] Ivi, pp. 85-86.
[110] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, p. 184.
[111] Passim, *Ch. I: Ethnicity: main minority ethnicities: Rakhane and Rohingya*; *Ch.I: Religion: Buddhism and Burmese Politics*.

1997, despite the opposition of the US and the EU to Burma's inclusion, the country obtained its membership in the organization[112]. In response, Europe suspended preferential trade benefits to Burma and the US adopted a ban on US investment, being America Burma's fourth most important investor[113]. In recent times, as a consequence of the renewed arrest of Suu Kyi in 2003 the Bush administration approved the *Freedom and Democracy Act*, imposing new sanctions on Burma. The effectiveness of the measure was highly criticized since, affecting the textile workers, it compelled many jobless women to enter the sex industry, leaving on the other hand the SPDC completely untouched[114]. Nevertheless, due to the persistent imprisonment of the NLD leader, in August 2006 the *Freedom and Democracy Act* was extended. Beside the controversial question of the sanction, the SPDC years are characterized, under the economical point of view, for building of strong relations with the PRC, important source of military hardware, low-interest loans and technical advisors, followed by Russia[115] and India[116].

In 2005 the government of Than Shwe suddenly announced to move the capital city from Rangoon to another location whose construction was in progress, later named Naypyidaw Myodaw[117]. The unexpected decision and the celebrative style used by the general had strong reminiscence in the tradition of the ancient Buddhist kings and revealed the intention of the premier to emulate them. Since an official reason justifying the measure has never been given, many speculations arose about it[118]. The relocation definitely indicates that the junta is centralizing its control over the country, however the most popular explication referred to the *yadaya*[119] acted by Than Shwe following the forecast of an astrologist that Rangoon would have soon exploded.

The forecast was finally confirmed in 2007 by the outbreak of the so called *Saffron Revolution*, a protest led by the monks in support of the more general demonstrations against the economic policies of the government. As protestors were physically beaten by the police, from Mandalay,

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[112] For a deep analysis of the topic: M. Than, *Myanmar in ASEAN: regional cooperation experience*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005.

[113] M. Oishi, F. Furuoka, *Can Japanese aid be an effective tool of influence? Case Studies of Cambodia and Burma*, in "Asian Survey", 2003, Vol. 43, No. 6, pp. 890-907, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2003.43.6.890.

[114] S. McCarthy, *Prospects for Justice and Stability in Burma*, in *Asian Survey*, Vol. 46, No. 3, pp. 417-436, University of California Press, 2006, http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2006.46.3.417, pp. 421-424. About the impact of Sanctions see also: D. M. Seekins, *Burma and U.S. Sanctions: Punishing an Authoritarian Regime*, in "Asian Survey", 2005, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 437-452, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2005.45.3.437; T. Kudo, *The Impact of U.S. Sanctions on the Myanmar Garament Industry*, in "Asian Survey", 2008, Vol. 48, No. 6, pp. 997-1017, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2008.48.6.997.

[115] About Burma-Russia nuclear agreements see: S. Turnell, *Burma's Insatiable State*, in "Asian Survey", 2008, Vol. 48, No. 6, pp. 958-976, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2008.48.6.958, pp. 974-975.

[116] M. W. Charney, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-187.

[117] Passim, *Ch. I: Religion: Buddhism and Burmese Politics*.

[118] D. I. Steinberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134.

[119] The *yadaya* is "an action taken on the advice of an astrologer to ward off potential evil", Ibidem.

ancient Burmese capital and main monastic centre of the country, the *sangha* spread the order to refuse donations from the families of the government élite, the most severe excommunication for a Buddhist believer[120]. Though the manifestation was pacific in nature, monks were violently beaten –an act which is illegal according to Buddhist laws– and in some cases killed. The fact, beside representing an incredibly significant event in the history of the relations between the *sangha* and Burmese political power, drew the attention of the international observers on Myanmar. The United Nations, after the Gambari report was released, urged the junta to open negotiations with the NLD, but without effective results.

[120] Passim, *Ch. I: Religion*.

Chapter III
"China and Burma"

III.1. China-Burma relations

III.1.1. From the PRC to the Cultural Revolution

Burma-China relations have always been strongly determined by two elements: the proximity of the two countries, which has caused in Burma a constant fear of its giant neighbour, and the porous nature of the border dividing them. During the Wold War II, between 1942 and 1945 Chinese militia of the GMD used to cross and settle inside and outside the Sino-Burmese border, as well as Burmese freedom fighters, who frequently used Chinese territory as a shelter. The government of Nanjing recognized Burma very early in September 1947, but the Chinese Nationalists were soon shook by the threat represented by the Communist led by Mao Zedong, who in turn showed support to the Burmese independence cause in 1945. As the Communists overthrew the Nationalists, however, the relations with Rangoon worsened as Burma showed resistance to join the Leftist block after its independence in 1948. The fact that Burma did not want to make the left turn and explicitly take their side was not well accepted by Beijing that soon dubbed the gained independence of the country as product of appeasement toward imperialism. Beijing began to spread its influence across the border: inhabitants of the villages controlled by the Communist guerrilla were subjected to Maoist indoctrination and the Chinese and the Burmese Communist parties were said to have associated with each other. As a consequence, the authorities of Yunnan joined the Burmese government in counter attacking the Maoist offensive; the Chinese nationalist authorities then, based on the fact that the local Yunnanese government had no qualification to act as such, let their troops invade Burmese territory after having crossed the border with the Southern province. In this way the stationing of GMD troops on Burmese soil began, a fact which, besides giving an idea of the abnormality of Sino-Burmese relations, represented for long time a thorn in the side for Rangoon in its friendship with Beijing[1].

[1] S. Y. Dai, *Peking and Rangoon,* in "The China Quarterly", 1961, No. 5, pp. 131-144, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/763356, p. 132.

As the PRC was officially established, the relations between the countries kept being complicated: On the eve of the Korean War Beijing Rangoon received the intimation from Beijing not to let any Western power building base on Burmese soil. But soon after Burma voted along the UN majority in condemning Chinese-backed North Korea as aggressor, move which represented a great affront in the eyes of the Chinese. This, together with rumours of collaboration of the country with the British and the Americans, was enough to make the PRC identify Burma as a state servant to capitalism. As a consequence, by the end of 1950 the Chinese and the Burmese Communists were said to have again joined hands.

The opportunity to make peace with Beijing was given by the UN resolution branding the PRC as an aggressor in the Korean War, with an embargo as a punishment. Burma voted against the resolution on February 1951 and soon after the new Burmese ambassador in Peking made declarations about the realized importance of China's role in Asia.

In 1952 Premier U Nu expressed his willingness to seek and accept aid both from China and from the USSR, with the condition that no "strings" were attached, in accordance to its policy of strict neutralism[2]. The alignment of Rangoon was evident during the Asian Socialist Conference, held in January-February 1953 and sponsored by Burma: in this occasion Burma's intervention attacked the imperialism of the Soviet block but carefully avoided to talk about the PRC. Soon after, in connection with its own measures adopted against the GMD militias stationing in its territory, Burma asked the UN to brand Nationalist China as an aggressor[3].

The attitude Burma developed starting from 1953 has been dubbed by the newspaper the Nation as a "One sided love affair": Burma began in evident way to make efforts to please Beijing through its friendly moves in foreign policy[4]. Also China, anyways, replied to Burma's advance with a certain number of moves, basically diplomatic meetings and opening of official cultural ties. In February of the same year the PRC offered help to Burma for solving the problem of the GMD trespassing by sending its troops there, but the proposal made the Burmese more scared than glad.

1953 was the year of new developments in Sino-Burmese relations. In 1954 thanks to the support of an international group constituted by US, Thailand and Nationalist China, the GMD militias were partly evacuated, removing in this way a "thorn" in the side of Communist China and Burma.

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[2] F. N. Trager, *Burma's Foreign Policy, 1948-56: Neutralism, Third Force, and Rice*, in "The Journal of Asian Studies", 1956, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 89-102, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2941548; J. S. Thomson, *Burmese Neutralism*, in "Political Science Quarterly", 1975, Vol. 72, No. 2, pp. 261-283, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2145776.

[3] S. Y. Dai, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

[4] Ivi, pp. 134-135.

In April a major trade agreement between the two countries was signed.

In June Zhou Enlai visited Burma, confirming in his public speech the 5 principles of peaceful coexistence. In November new trade agreements were concluded, establishing that the PRC would have bought great amounts of Burmese rice.

During this period Burma's neutralist policy gradually took shape, as Rangoon progressively addressed its critics to the US-PRC dispute as hegemonic attempt detrimental to Asia peaceful coexistence, and built closer ties with anti-Communist neighbours such as Thailand.

Thanks to further trade contracts in 1955, Chinese installations and equipment started arriving to Burma and, while travelling towards the Asian and African Conference, Zhou Enlai remarkably visited U Nu, confirming soon after at Bandung the willingness of the PRC to respect the Sino-Burmese border. In view of Zhou's declaration, when U Nu flew to America, he even attempted to mediate between Beijing and Washington, which of course resulted in no outcome.

In the fall of 1955 new cultural relations were created, further diplomatic exchanges took place, and several Sino-Burmese protocols and agreements were signed. Burma's concern not to offend China was evident in occasion of the informal visit that Mrs. Sun Yatsen paid to Burma: after some Rangoon-based newspaper made reference to her, the police immediately arrested the editors[5].

Soon after U Nu resigned from Prime Minister in favour of U Ba Swe because of the new strength demonstrated by the opposition and the necessity of giving a new organization to its own party. During this time, U Nu reportedly suspected the financial support given by the Chinese embassy to its political opponents, but in its declaration such an allegation always appeared to be down-toned and he avoided addressing the PRC in explicit way.

In 1956, anyways the border issue came to the fore once again and numerous Chinese Communist troops entered Burma, the PRC justifying the act maintaining that those troops were necessary to preserve peace in the border Wa district in the Northeast of the Shan State. The situation did not degenerate only thanks to the calm of the Burmese leaders and their intention not to further provoke a reaction from Beijing. In October U Nu made a special trip to Beijing by invitation of Zhou Enlai to negotiate about the border settlement, which was finally reached in 1960.

Since Burmese independence from the British, three major agreements had been concluded, in 1894, 1897, and 1941[6]. According to these agreements, however, two of the four sections of the

[5] Ivi, pp. 136-137.

[6] M. Maung, *The Burma-China Boundary Settlement*, in "Asian Survey", 1961, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 38-43, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3023665.

Sino-Burmese borderline remained without a defined status. The Nu-Zhou negotiations reached the following terms of the deal: Peking would have recognized the frontier line lying in the Wa district which was located in 1941, but never ratified by China, and Chinese forces stationed west of this line would have been repatriated[7]; three villages in the Kachin State –Hpimaw, Gawlum, Kangfang– which the McMahon Line of 1914 included without Chinese approval, would have been returned to Beijing, and Burmese forces would analogously be evacuated; a negotiated settlement dealt with the issue of the Namwan Assigned Tract, under "perpetual lease" to Burma since British times and extending between the Shan and Kachin States.

The Sino-Burmese Agreement on the Boundary Question however was finally signed in Beijing in January 1960 by Ne Win and Zhou Enlai along with the Non-Aggression Treaty. The final version of the Boundary settlement basically reproduced the abovementioned terms; the Non-aggression treaty, on the other hand, contained two important statements.

Art. 3 established that «each contracting party undertakes not to carry out acts of aggression against the other and not to take part in any military alliance directed against the other party». In this way the Burma government agreed to formally limit its freedom of action in terms of self defence. As a matter of fact, the Non-Aggression Treaty conferred to the Beijing a veto over Burma's future foreign relations in respect to military defence. Such a bond however did not prevent in 1963 rumours about secret Burmese acquisition of American and West-German weapons to spread[8].

China did not welcome the move and clearly expressed its concern and irritation over Burmese "deviationism" when in July 1964 Premier Zhou Enlai visited Myanmar. Zhou explicitly asked Ne Win to reaffirm his understanding of Art.3 of the Treaty. Though the General agreed to the Chinese request, no specific statement about the "right" interpretations of the commitment was included in the final report.

On the other hand, Art. 4 stated that «The contracting parties declare they will develop and strengthen the economic and cultural ties between the two states in a spirit of friendship and cooperation in accordance with the principles of equality and mutual benefit and mutual non interference in each other's internal affairs»[9].

Though equality is prescribed as conditional, when the cooperation is to be done between a big power vis-à-vis a small and weak partner, it is likely that the partnership will finally result in the

[7] S. Y. Dai, *op. cit.*, p. 138.
[8] R. A. Holmes, *Burma's Foreign Policy Toward China Since 1962*, in "Pacific Affairs", 1972, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 240-254, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable//2755554, p. 241.
[9] Ivi, p. 242.

extension of the first's influence over the second. As a matter of fact, trade exchanges between the two countries increased in absolute terms, but the equality clause did not receive application.

In the meantime, while the negotiation for the border agreement continued, the two countries engaged in the so called "People's Diplomacy", consisting in the solid exchange of a wide variety of public subjects and entities such as trade unionists, leaders of Parliament, officials, youth delegates, medical personnel, journalists, sportsmen, important political personages etc. From this point of view, the Burmese decision of accepting again US aid in 1959 represented somehow an exceptional move, but could also be interpreted as «Rangoon's new found sense of relative safety with the final working-out of the boundary question»[10].

The cultural diplomacy in which the two countries engaged in this period however, seemed to have two different meanings in Beijing and in Rangoon[11]; the Burmese government apparently considered these ties as a genuine proof of availability and goodwill towards China, while the Chinese probably looked at the people's diplomacy as to an instrument to promote Chinese interests, eliminate Western potential influence from the country –the American in particular– and boost the creation of closer ties with the PRC.

This would represent additional evidence of the fact that the Chinese have generally speaking demonstrated to possess a much clearer idea of their targets when compared to the frequently inscrutable Burmese policy; this feature of Chinese conduction of international affairs came along with a strong sense of urgency about their achievement, which is evident in PRC's interaction with Myanmar[12].

A clear evidence of the "realist" conception of such a policy is given by the fact that all the associations involved in it from the Chinese side –the Burma-China Friendship Association, the All Burma Peace Committee, the People's Democratic Youth League, the Afro-Asian Solidarity Committee, etc– used to work as centre of distribution of pro-PRC propaganda aimed to influence the Burmese to take a favourable position toward China and an hostile one towards China's adversaries. It was not a case that in 1967 these same organizations were involved in Cultural Revolution activities which culminated in the anti-Chinese riot, *casus belli* of the Sino-Burmese rift. Not a case also that after the 1967 crisis these pro-Chinese political organizations, given the worsening of the relation between the two governments, stopped being active[13].

In February 1964 the Chinese Premier Chen Yi and Foreign Minister Zhou Enlai visited Burma. According to foreign press the scope of the visit was to obtain the General's support and

[10] Ibidem.
[11] R. A. Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 242.
[12] H. Passin, *China's Cultural diplomacy*, London, China Quarterly, 1962, p. 9.
[13] R. A. Holmes, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

endorsement of forthcoming Chinese call for a second Afro-Asian Conference to be held in PRC and primarily aimed to discuss, among other things, the Sino-Indian border dispute. This was based on the fact that, one week prior to Zhou's arrival in Rangoon, Ne Win flew to the Indian capital receiving from Nehru the request to support India's call for a conference of non-aligned nations to be held in Cairo with the exclusion of the PRC. Sandwiched between the two opposite petitions, the General resorted to its evergreen neutralism and urged the two powerful neighbours to accept the Colombo powers recommendations as a starting point to find an accommodation to their territorial dispute.

In 1966 Chairman Liu Shaoqi visited Myanmar once again along with Zhou Enlai. Liu's tones were vehemently anti-imperialist and anti-American; in addition to this, with regard to the Vietnam affair, he explicitly accused the US for having acted as an aggressor and for having refused the NLF's peace proposals. By doing this, Liu intimated to Burma to adopt a more active role in the anti-imperialist struggle along with China. The Chairman's intention was to exhort the country to demonstrate greater commitment to the Chinese cause by opposing the American Vietnam's policy. Given Burma's tenacious neutralism, China's frustration over its failure to make Burma support Chinese foreign policy has been, with great probability, one of the reasons of the deterioration of the bilateral relations which brought to the rift of 1967. Generally, most commentators agree that the major cause of the schism was the Chinese Cultural Revolution and China's consequent attempt to "export it", even to nations who enjoyed friendly relation with the PRC[14]. In sum, it is possible to conclude that PRC's failure over making Burma a Chinese client state and the advent of the Cultural Revolution were the main causes of the Sino-Burmese breakup which occurred at the end of the 1960s.

With reference to the second motivation, still unclear why China wanted to export the Cultural Revolution in Burma, and a number of explications appear as possible. A first cause for the PRC to embark in its "Red Guard Diplomacy" could have been its own status of chaos due to the revolutionary situation itself; from this point of view, the exportation of the revolutionary enthusiasm could have been an outward "spill-over effect" of Chinese domestic reality[15]. Another possibility is that China, always divided between the urgency of improving government-to-government relations with Rangoon and the necessity of maintaining links with the local Communists, decided to use "hard" ways to force Ne Win to accept the BCP participation in the

[14] R. A. Holmes, *China-Burma Relations since the Rift*, in "Asian Survey", 1972, Vol. 12, No. 8, pp. 686-700, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2643109, p. 686.
[15] J. K. Fairbank, *Storia della Cina contemporanea (1800-1985)*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1998, p. 419.

government. This possibility could be supported by the fact that China saw Burma as very weak due to its economic crisis, considering relatively easy task to make the government capitulate[16].

Whatever was the motivation of China, its revolutionary approach to Burma did not produce the planned results, but contributed to strengthen Ne Win's determination to resist to Chinese influence and to create greater unity in support of the regime[17].

Another important aspect in the development of Burma's relations with China concerned trade and economic assistance. In 1961 a trade agreement was signed and consequently trade increased between the two nations but, as mentioned, the "principle of equilibrium between the value of imports and exports" was not respected.

In the same year also an agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation was concluded. Chinese experts started arriving in Burma in 1962, but by 1967 only three of the thirteen negotiated projects had been completed, so that Chinese aid program finally revealed to be a failure, and it gave occasion to the PRC to accuse Burma of having sabotaged the joint projects.

At that time however, China was not the only foreign aid supplier for Burma; the number of donors included Japan, the World Bank, the Colombo Plan and United Nations Development Program, among the others[18].

Chinese influence in Burma increased between 1960 and 1962 but, as mentioned before, after Ne Win's advent the issuing by the Revolutionary Council of the Burmese Way to Socialism (BWTS) negatively affected such an achievement, as the BWTS was precisely designed to reduce foreign influence in Burma, especially the Chinese one. The new governmental manifesto represented an affront and an obstacle to Burma, as the government stopped its propaganda activities and establishing control over Chinese run schools[19].

The search for a stably neutral position brought Rangoon to adopt positions which were non-aligned with or directly contrary to Chinese ones in a number of occasions.

Rangoon signed the Test Ban Treaty of 1963 while China opposed it; it recognized as Indian territory a portion of land claimed by China in the Sino-Indian border dispute; it favoured the formation of Malaysia vis-à-vis Chinese disapproval; it struggled to maintain a neutral position in the Vietnam War despite Chinese anti US and pro NLF engagement and its attempt of involving Rangoon; Burma maintained positive relations with USSR while Beijing had

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[16] R. A. Holmes, *Burma's Foreign Policy…*, cit., p. 251.
[17] R. A. Holmes, *China-Burma Relations…*, cit., p. 688.
[18] A. Adeleke, *The Strings of Neutralism: Burma and the Colombo Plan*, in "Pacific Affairs", Vol. 76, No. 4, pp. 593-610, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40026423.
[19] R. A. Holmes, *Burma's Foreign Policy...*, cit., pp. 247-248.

embarked in a ideological-hegemonic competition with Moscow; finally, Burma remained neutral even in the in the Laotian issue in face of China's supports to the Pathet Lao.

Burma's political leaders have however consistently tried to maintain cordial relations with China. Burma's adoption of a policy of neutralism, on the other hand, was undoubtedly influenced by its geographical position, imposing the necessity of avoid antagonizing Beijing: China was, again, the main reason for Burma's neutralism.

As a consequence of the 1967 rift, however, for a period the relations were tense and highly ideological, especially from the Chinese side. Between 1967 and 1970 the PRC launched a wave of anti Burmese propaganda while Chinese media praised the BCP armed struggle against the Rangoon government.

The National Chinese News Agency (NCNA) called for the Burmese people to the CPB's efforts to rebel against the Revolutionary Council and establish a democratic government following Chinese example.

This attitude however showed that Burma was determined not to capitulate under Chinese pressure. This led Beijing to realize that the main result obtained from its effort of exporting the revolution was «to burn many of the bridges to the world outside that Peking so carefully constructed during the post Bandung era of peaceful coexistence». The disadvantages got from its Red Guard Diplomacy probably played a role in the reshaping of Chinese strategy in Southeast Asia, especially with respect to Burma.

This hostile post-1967 phase, being a by-product of the Cultural Revolution, finished as the Revolution itself began to agonize.

In 1968, after premier Zhou Enlai had regained control of the Foreign Ministry overthrowing the Revolution Group[20], China began to make peaceful overtures to Burma. This new pacification took place despite the obvious continuing close ties between China and the Burma Communist Party (BCP). Thus Rangoon's intentions to improve relations with the PRC in the belief that China would have helped in containing the Communist rebels proved to be wrong at least for a little bit longer, since the first phase of Chinese Burma policy after the rift saw the development of the so called "dual track diplomacy".

III.1.2. The end of the dual track diplomacy towards Burma

After Zhou Enlai led his conservative counterattack against the Cultural Revolution group, he impressed a new rebalanced spirit to China's Burma policy. The decision of the leader reflected

[20] H. Schmidt-Glintzer, *La Cina contemporanea. Dalle guerre dell'oppio a oggi*, Roma, Carocci, 2002, pp. 101-102.

the awareness that revolutionary expectations in Burma had been overestimated and that China began to doubt the failure. Beijing began to move toward a rapprochement with the Burmese regime.

Burmese efforts of reconciliation started in earnest in 1969 as Burmese troops stopped their border patrols after clashes with the PLA. In January 1969 Ne Win flew to Pakistan, reportedly to discuss with Chinese officials in Rawalpindi about perspective for an improvement in bilateral relations.

Despite Ne win's sense of urgency regarding this important matter, the process of normalization was slow in showing its first tangible steps. The fact that Burma apparently wanted to downplay Chinese importance through the "boycott" of functions of the PRC sending as representatives only low-level officials, contributed to the delay[21].

However, both nations appeared to have agreed in 1970 to restore official diplomatic representatives in the reciprocal embassies.

After this moment, starting from 1971, China inaugurated its new "Dual track policy", aimed to maintain its role of leader of the non-soviet communist block and supporter of the revolution while making efforts to improve bilateral relations with those Asian government who had suffered of its extremist shift in 1967[22]. Burma was, among the most evident case.

This was somehow a continuation of the dual policy Beijing had always held with Burma since the Bandung era, maintaining good relations with U Nu and secretly supporting the BCP at the same time[23]. After the rift however, this last aspect of Chinese two faced approach to Burma progressively diminished.

In this phase the CCP was challenged by the dilemma of assessing how much help it should have given to communist parties in Thailand, Malaysia, Burma, Indonesia, Philippines providing material support and setting up clandestine radios, without affect the relation with the same Southeast Asian countries where the insurgency was taking place[24]. The fact that Beijing successfully normalized diplomatic relations with Rangoon in 1971 and kept them positive in a certain way was the proof that it was able to balance the two alternatives of the dilemma and that the dual track policy was working.

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[21] R. A. Holmes, *China-Burma Relations*…, cit., p. 695.

[22] W. R. Heaton, *China and Southeast Asian Communist Movements: The Decline of Dual Track Diplomacy*, in "Asian Survey", 1982, Vol. 22, No. 8, pp. 779-800, URL: http://ww.jstor.org/stable/2643647, p. 780.

[23] W. Bert, *Chinese Policy toward Burma and Indonesia: a Post-Mao Perspective*, in "Asian Survey", 1985, Vol. 25, No. 9, pp. 963-980, URL: http: www.jstor.org/stable/2644421, p. 969.

[24] R. A. Holmes, *China-Burma Relations.*…, cit., p. 696.

Beijing's shift was due to a new importance given to Southeast Asian countries within the changed international situation characterized by the exacerbation of the Sino-Soviet dispute and the emergence of the Sino-US rapprochement[25].

Chinese leadership's readiness in reshaping its position on revolutionary movements as to serve in the best way its foreign policy interest proved once again its strongly realist posture in the conduction of international relations[26].

The success of China in restoring its relations with the Burma government to the pre-1967 level was evident in the reception given to General Ne Win during his informal trip to China at the invitation of premier Zhou Enlai.

Both the countries appeared to be satisfied by the interested in the reconciliation. Beijing realized that the Burmese communist forces were breaking up[27]; moreover it had cogent problems to deal with, namely the internal post-revolution reconstruction and the external relations with the USSR, the US and Vietnam. Rangoon in turn, since it desired reconciliation with Beijing, demonstrated to be receptive to the Chinese flattery. Confirmation of the newfound harmony was Burma's vote, along with the majority of the UN General Assembly, for the expulsion of Taiwan out of the UN to the advantage of Beijing, in October 1971[28].

Since 1975 however a number of significant changes created a challenge to dual track diplomacy and as a result China further reduced its ties with insurgencies in favour of strengthening governmental ties. With respect to Sino-Burmese relations this resulted in the detachment of the CCP from the BCP.

The shift was due to the most recent upheavals in Vietnam and to the awareness of the new Dengist leadership of the inefficiency of the old pro-guerrilla strategy. The return of Deng Xiaoping in 1978 put an end to the attention to insurgent movements and made of the creation of closer ties with the West the new priority[29]. The motivation of this change lied in the fact that China's relations with its former ally Vietnam deteriorated dramatically. After Vietnam concluded a treaty of peace and friendship with the USSR in the fall of 1978 Vietnamese forces invaded Democratic Kampuchea, China's client state. China perceived Vietnam as ground for the expansion of Soviet hegemony in Southeast Asia and consequently pointed out the improvement of relations with Vietnam's opponents as a necessary means to contain Soviet-

[25] B. Onnis, *La Cina nelle relazioni internazionali. Dalle guerre dell'oppio a oggi*, Roma, Carocci, 2011, pp. 47-50; M. Sabattini, P. Santangelo, *Storia della Cina*, Roma-Bari, Laterza, 2005, p. 630.
[26] R. A. Holmes, *China-Burma Relations*…, cit., p. 700.
[27] Ivi, pp. 694-698.
[28] B. Onnis, *op. cit.*, pp. 54-55.
[29] J. K. Fairbank, *op. cit.*, pp. 430-431; M Sabattini, P. Santangelo, *op. cit.*, pp. 634-636.

Vietnamese influence[30]. China's concern about Soviet expansionism increased as a consequence of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. In sum, classifying the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea as phases of a grand strategy of global domination[31], with its new "three worlds" doctrine the PRC urged Japan, China, Australia, and Southeast Asia to cooperate[32]. Several Southeast Asian nations however remained suspicious of Beijing's long-term intentions in the region, remaining the CCP's ties with the other Communist parties a thorn in the side in their relation with the PRC. Given the urgency or counterattacking the USSR by creating joining hands with these governments, China finally decided to progressively abandon the brother parties, whose support anyways had turned in "a waste of time and money"[33].

With regard to Burma, Beijing approach to the BCP was initially to push the BCP and the central government to negotiate with each other[34], while downplaying Chinese support for the insurgents. Beijing was apparently influential in arranging negotiations between the Communists and Rangoon in 1980, but Ne Win unwillingness to make concessions to the BCP put both the BCP and China in an uncomfortable position[35]. In addition to reduced material support and pressure towards negotiation from China, the party had also suffered defections because of a government amnesty program launched in the same year. Beijing's ties with the BCP, moreover where negatively affecting its new Southeast Asian policy, perpetuating the perception that communist parties in the region were CCP's proxies. As a consequence, the BCP line progressively diverged from that of Beijing and as the Party experienced increasing internal difficulties from 1975, China took distance from it.

The four major causes of the failure of the Burmese Communists are the following; first, the weakness following purges within its ranks[36]; second, its incompetence in collect the ethnic rebel forces under its leadership, in an organized war against Rangoon[37]; third, the consensus enjoyed by the BCP was affected by the shadow of the CCP since, like in other Southeast Asian countries, it appeared as the surrogate of China's Communism: its progressive identification with China, in great part product of the governmental counter-propaganda, made him appear as lackey

[30] J. K. Fairbank, *op. cit.*, p. 434; M Sabattini, P. Santangelo, *op. cit.*, p. 632.
[31] Burma opposed USSR's invasion of Afghanistan as well as Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea; moreover it supported the Pol Pot regime. Cfr: W. Bert, *op. cit.*, p. 968.
[32] B. Onnis, *op. cit.*, p. 58.
[33] R. A. Holmes, *China-Burma Relations*…, cit., p. 700.
[34] W. Bert, *op. cit.*, p. 970.
[35] W. R. Heaton, *op. cit.*, pp. 791-793.
[36] R. A. Holmes, *China-Burma Relations*…, cit., p. 689.
[37] Ivi, p. 690.

of Beijing and traitor of the country[38]; the Communist finally made the mistake of establishing a regime of terror in the villages the occupied in central and Southern Burma, showing no respect for monks, shrines and consequently pushing the population to collaborate with the government in planning surprise attacks against its bases. These led the CPB to perform a "Long March" to Northern Burma which made it lose greater control over the territory.

The deterioration of the BCP's relations with the CCP, however, did not seem to have a huge impact on Burma's foreign policy. Rangoon showed no inclination to alter its policy neutralism, isolationism and non-alignment[39].

In this phase the PRC started making efforts to improve relations with the Burmese government without seemingly undermine its commitment to support the communist insurgency in Burma.

Chinese support for "wars of national liberation" was not a direct out growth of the Cultural Revolution. China's identification with the Burmese insurgent movement dates back many years, since its founding the PRC has given at least tacit support to the CBP. After the 1960 border agreement and friendship treaty the PRC was reluctant to publicly support the CPB; after 1967 China begun putting increasing emphasis on a long standing policy. On Burma's side: Chinese assistance to the rebels had been widely suspected before that time, but then started explicitly linking insurgent activity with external support.

But despite China's apparent increased aids to support the CPB victory for the guerrilla appeared remote.

III.1.3. Contemporary times

Myanmar-China relations, in sum, seemed to fit, albeit somewhat irregularly, into the pattern of post-Cold War Chinese relations with Southeast Asia. (Of course the secrecy surrounding the policies of both the regimes makes it difficult to discern trends and implications with great precisions). From the late 1980s to the early 1990s the two governments joined hands in their mutual search for international contacts and support during a period when both were isolated by the Western governments and their followers[40].

Myanmar's solitude was particularly strong: unlike China and its Southeast Asian neighbours the military junta persisted in its cruel repression and obstinate isolationism; the generals' incompetence in dealing with the problems of the country, first of all its economic stagnation,

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[38] Ivi, pp. 690-691.

[39] E. W. Martin, *Burma in 1975: New Dimensions to Non-Alignmen*t, in "Asian Survey", 1976, Vol. 16, No. 2, pp. 173-177, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2643145.

[40] D. M. Seekins, *Burma and U.S. Sanctions: Punishing an Authoritarian Regime*, in "Asian Survey", 2005, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 437-452, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2005.45.3.437.

further impoverished the country and created a paradoxical situation: Myanmar desperately needed to open itself to the world, but kept antagonizing the great part of it. A certain level of reluctance existed also towards the PRC, thus the common ground which China succeed in building with other neighbours on the basis of mutual interest –the "economic win-win cooperation (*jingji shang hezuo gongying*)[41]– was less in the case of China-Myanmar relations. Nevertheless, the Myanmar government supported export of natural resources such as natural gas and hydroelectric power to China in return for goods and payments beneficial to the members of the regime. China benefitted from the resources provided by Myanmar and Chinese in the country increased notably. As a consequence, though with some exceptions, Myanmar-China relations appeared to follow the same path of the general post-Cold War relations which China established with the rest of Southeast Asia[42].

Need and isolation "forced" Myanmar to build a relation with China[43]. In front of such a situation, perhaps fearing an excessive shift in favour of the PRC, the admission process of Burma in the Association of Southeast Asian Countries (ASEAN) has been facilitated.

Within ASEAN Myanmar's role appeared to be in line with Chinese interests[44], basically that organization avoids to embark in policies which could damages China's rising influence in Southeast Asia[45].

At the same time China seemed aware that Myanmar was reluctant to fall under its control, as Myanmar tried to improve its relations with India, others in Southeast Asia and other powers, possibly including the US; in this perspective, the visit of the American Secretary of States Hillary Clinton to Myanmar in December 2011 seemed to open a new trend in Myanmar's search for advantages, though Burmese leaders maintain a certain level of unpredictability in their policy-making.

While Burmese position was not dangerous to Chinese revisionism in the South China Sea and presumably, and was probably willing to moderate differences between China and other ASEAN nations, at the same time tension came back along the Sino-Burmese border in 2009.

Despite these divergences, the PRC –motivated by the need of secure border stability and by the strategic relevance of Myanmar in Beijing's geopolitical play in the area– continued to provide

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[41] B. Onnis, *op. cit.*, p. 99 ; R. Sutter, *Myanmar in Contemporary Chinese Foreign Policy – Strengthening Common Ground, Managing Differences*, in "Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs", 2012, Vol. 31, No. 1, pp. 29-51, URL: www.CurrentSoutheastAsianAffairs.org, p. 30.

[42] R. Sutter, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

[43] N. Swanström, *Sino-Myanmar Relations: Security and Beyond*, in "Asia Papers" (Stockholm-Nacka, Institute for Security and Development Policy) 2012, June, p. 22.

[44] Ivi, pp. 34, 36, 39.

[45] B. Onnis, *op. cit.*, p. 91.

active support for Myanmar even in its worst moments. China built numerous partnerships with Myanmar, among the others, while the generals wholly enjoyed the benefits deriving from Chinese economic and military aid, as well as its political support within the UN. China opposed Western-led proposals to boycott the Myanmar regime. Even vis-à-vis the possibility of suffering a boycott of the 2008 Olympic games due to its support to the Burmese authoritarianism China kept sustaining the military junta within the UN and with or when dealing with other powers.

After Cyclone Nargis devastated the Irrawaddy delta in 2008 the generals obtusely refused any assistance which could not be controlled by their government, worsening the ongoing humanitarian crisis. The PRC offered Myanmar Chinese aid, though modest, in face of general criticism by the international actors and public opinion. Soon however China itself was shook by a natural calamity in Sichuan, consequently focusing its efforts in the domestic emergency.

In 2009 Chinese relations with countries in the area and the US worsen due to its territorial claims; in parallel, China confirmed its support to the *Tatmadaw* regime, which was preparing to the transition towards the civilian rule (elections were planned for November 2010).

Myanmar however seemed to be intentioned to take advantage of Chinese situation to enhance control over some of the armed militias along the Sino-Burmese border, source of insurgency against the Burmese government from the 1960s until a chase fire reached in 1980s. Apparently the *Tatmadaw* intervention against local militias violated the terms of the aforesaid agreement. In addition to this, the raid caused a flux or refugees, whose number was estimated more than 35,000, heading towards China. Calm was eventually restored thanks to the Chinese goodwill to solve the problem in pacific way.

Despite these divergences over the territorial problem, China maintained high level collaboration with Beijing: Chinese vice president Xi Jinping arrived in Myanmar in December 2009 to discuss economic partnerships and in November the forthcoming construction of a pipeline to connect Myanmar coast with mainland China was announced[46].

While busy in the ongoing territorial dispute with the US and Southeast Asian countries over the South China Sea region, China never missed to pay attention to Burma. Wen Jiabao visited Naypidaw in June 2010, concluding a number of agreements, regarding oil and gas pipelines across Myanmar to directly link China with the IO and to avoid shipping through the Strait of Malacca, communication facilities, a hydroelectric power station, aid packages. In addition to this the Burmese generals updated the Chinese leader with regard to their intention to slightly

[46] W. Moe, *Xi Jinping's Burma question*, in "The Irrawaddy", 21th October 2010, URL: http://www2.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=19794.

and progressively open democratization. The meeting was concluded with the reconfirmation of the reciprocal promise to maintain stability.

General Than Shwe in turn visited China in September 2010, seeking Chinese support for the election that were going to be held in two months; China guaranteed its endorsement and strong support against criticism proceeding from the international community about the elections.

As promised China endorsed the results of the November 2010 polls, and Chinese officials were reported to have acted as mediators between the *Tatmadaw* and some minorities along the Sino-Burmese frontier supported by and associated to China. China's availability is understandable given the relevance of the maintenance of stability along the border and during the civilian transition for the successful fulfilment of Chinese-participated project (in particular the pipelines) and for Chinese growing economic and strategic interest in the country. Continued China-Myanmar high level meetings confirmed the PRC as Burmese leading partner.

New problems along the border arose in 2011: Myanmar launched an intervention to disarm an ethnic-based independent security force without knowing it was tied to China along another section of the border; the fact occurred affected negatively China representing an obstacle for an important Chinese dam project in Myanmar. In the end the works were interrupted by Thein Shwe government in September. China obviously reacted with surprise, urged for a rapid and peaceful solution of the matter.

The overall trend of the Sino-Burmese relations demonstrates that Chinese leaders have been flexible and available in building closer ties with Myanmar. Myanmar in turn has revealed to be an obstinate and unpredictable ally, at the same time aware of the value of Chinese support in economic, military and political terms. Burmese priority has always been and still is the avoidance of an excessive dependence from any hegemonic power, China in particular, as it was the main source of threat for the Southeast Asian country since modern times.[47] China is perfectly conscious that such a posture adopted by the Burmese leaders generates limits to foreign influence (especially the Chinese one) on the decision making in Myanmar; at the same time, however, Beijing does not renounce to its efforts, building influence through trade, development, investment appealing for both the governments.

[47] R. A. Holmes, *Burma's Foreign Policy…*, cit., p. 253.

III.2. Chinese interests in Burma

III.2.1. Strategic Interests: arms deals and expansion in the IOR

Arms deals

Strategic relations between China and Burma have been instrumental for the interests both of the *Tatmadaw* –to obtain arm deals which could allow it expand the military and strengthen its power over the country– and of the CCP –to extend Chinese influence on the "reject" country and get strategic benefits in its new Indian Ocean strategy. As a consequence, the strategic relations existing between the two regimes had important implications; these have been implications of domestic nature in the first case, at the expense of Burma's democratization and economic balance, and of external nature in the second case, enhancing the importance of the country as a potential battleground between China and India in the region[48].

Since the very moment of its independence Burma adopted a neutralist foreign policy in order to avoid to be drawn into the Cold War or into tensions existing between the great Indian and Chinese neighbour. This neutralism has been defined sometimes "oblique neutrality" since, as Ne Win seized power, strategic relations between the two authoritarian states increased[49]. This was not due to ideological affiliation, but to necessity: the Burmese regime could not survive alone, shook by a continuous civil war caused by the communist and the ethnic insurgencies and the increasing social turmoil. The SLORC obtained the support needed from China signing in November 1989 a $2 billion arms deal which brought to Burma arms, ammunition and military trainers[50]. Also Chinese activity aimed to build bases in Burmese territory was reported, fact still today denied by both the nations[51].

From the domestic point of view, the main implication of the closer association with China implied by SLORC's massive arms acquisition was the reorganization and expansion of the Burmese Army and the increase of its control over the country[52]. The necessity of such a military expansion was inspired in the junta by the popular uprisings of 1988, which demonstrated that the *Tatmadaw* had no complete capacity of controlling the urban centres and, at the same time, quell ethnic guerrilla. Thanks to the Chinese-financed expansion of the *Tatmadaw*, it enhanced its capacity of controlling the cities and at the same time, in its fight against ethnic armed forces,

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[48] N. Swanström, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

[49] D. Arnott, *China-Burma relations*, in VV.AA., *Challenges to Democratization in Burma, perspectives of multilateral and bilateral responses*, Stockholm, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2001, pp. 69-86, URL: http://www.idea.int/asia_pacific/burma/, p. 71.

[50] Ivi, pp. 72-73.

[51] Passim: *Strategic interests: arms deals and expansion in the IOR.*

[52] D. Arnott, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

switched from a seasonal combat strategy to the one of year round occupation. Of course China was neither SLORC's exclusive arms supplier[53], nor the first one as the junta started receiving military support as early as 1988 from Singapore and Pakistan. However, Chinese massive cooperation was fundamental in enabling the generals to pursue their obsession of the "non-disintegration of the Union" and build "a highly centralised, ethnically Burman-dominated state"[54]. The Army won over its chronic weakness: previously its main military strategy against the ethnic insurgents was to conduct seasonal campaigns and then return to barrack remaining inactive during the monsoon season. After the Chinese supplied material and equipment the soldier were enabled to stay all year long in the occupied territory. This strategy of occupation had the non-Burman civilian population as its main victim. As the stagnant economy was not suitable to support the cost of the expanded Army, a self reliance policy of the army was launched as a new system of financing. This meant in practice to force villagers to sustain the armed forces, recruiting them as forced labourers, confiscating lands and imposing them to provide food and shelter to the army[55].

In sum, in terms of domestic implications, Sino-Burmese strategic relations consisting in Chinese arms supply to the generals resulted in the perpetuation of the authoritarian and incompetent junta at the power, obtained trough a modernization of the armed forces. This has enhanced the effectiveness of the military control over the territory, worsening the economic situation and the Human Right balance of the country, to the detriment of the wider Burmese democratization process.

Expansion in the IOR

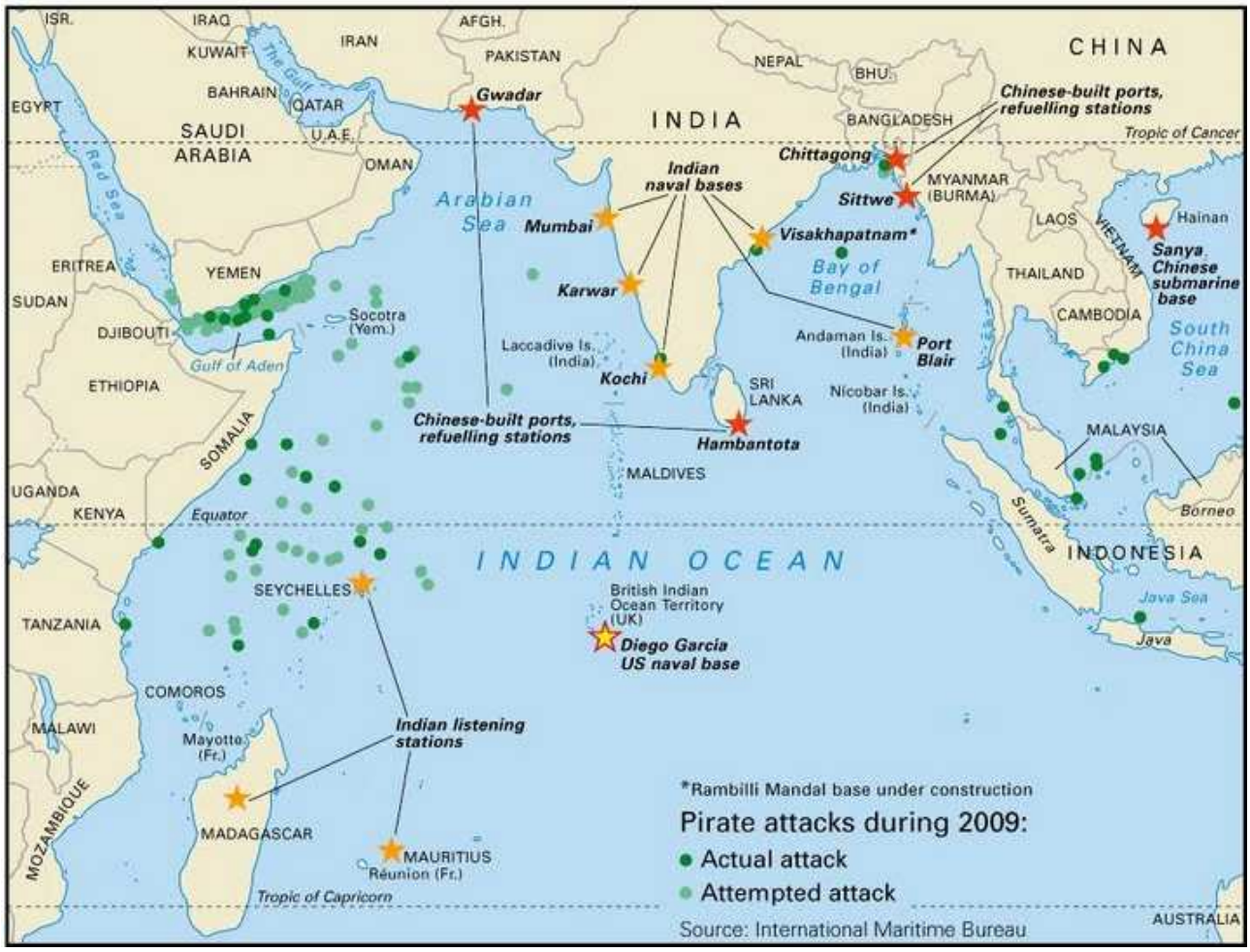
Considering external strategic benefits, it is China the one holding the strongest interests in collaboration with Myanmar. China's Burma policy in terms of strategic implications in the geopolitics of the region must be framed within the wider expansionist plan undertaken by China in the Indian Ocean region (IOR).

According to the so-called "String of Pearls" (SOP) theory, the PRC is interacting with countries located along the sea lines of communications (SLOCs) from East Asia to the Middle East in order to create strategic relationships and build ports and shipping facilities; this net of contacts

[53] N. Swanström, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
[54] A. Selth, *Transforming the Tatmadaw: The Burmese Armed Forces Since 1988*, Canberra, Australian National University Press, 1996.
[55] D. Arnott, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

and bases located all across the IOR, as a whole, appears as a chain across the region, the so called "String of Pearls"[56].

Image 3. "Power competition in the IOR" (source: International Maritime Bureau)



Although the SOP has not been declared by Beijing as its official strategy and despite the fact that the "pearls" forming the "string" at the moment constitute purely commercial facilities, however their potential military development and the "encirclement" they create around the Indian peninsula have brought many to consider the SOP as the new strategy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in the IOR, aimed to boost the Chinese influence in the region, especially in anti-Indian function[57].

[56] C. R. B. Rai, *China's "String of Pearls" – Is Male next?*, in "Indian Defence Review", 2013, Vol. 28, No. 2, URL: http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/chinas-string-of-pearls-is-male-next/.
[57] A. Selth, *op. cit.*

Image 4. "China's String of Pearls" (source: securityobserver.org)

The SOP, as to the theory developed by the US lieutenant C. J. Pehrson[58], is constituted by a number of different "pearls" located along the SLOCs and extending from mainland China (the eastern pearl of Hainan Islands) to the Red Sea (the western pearl of Port Sudan); each pearl is the result of the relations, interaction and negotiation of the PRC with the respective country. Presently Myanmar hosts nothing less than two pearls, the ports of Sittwe and Kyaykypyu, and rumours reported Chinese activity on another potential pearl to be, the Coco Islands[59].

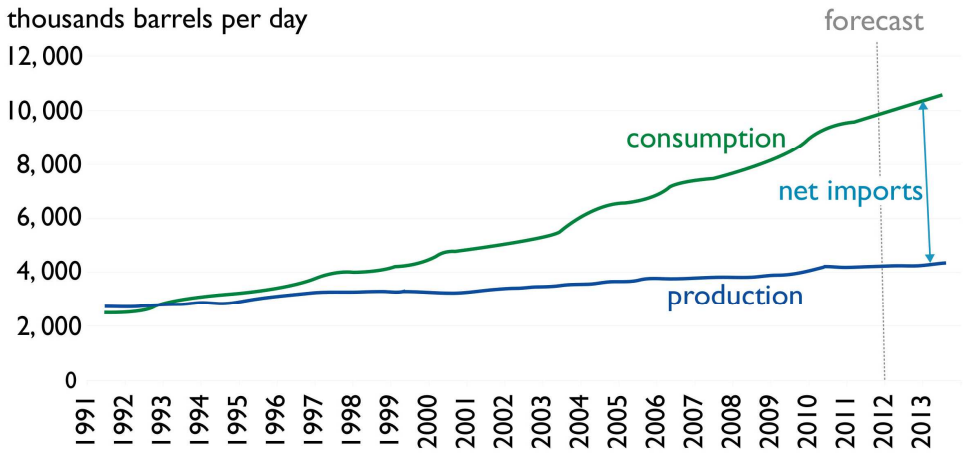
The deep water port in Sittwe is a Burmese port constructed by Indian funding and located in Sittwe, capital of the Rakhine State (former Arakan), in western Myanmar, on the Bay of Bengal. The construction of the port was part of the wider Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project, agreed in 2008 by the two countries and aimed to develop transport infrastructures between Southwestern Myanmar and Northeast India[60]. Later on, China has been given the right to construct a naval base in Sittwe, consequently gaining direct access to the Bay of Bengal: Sittwe is extremely important from the strategic point of view given its proximity to Kolkata, the

[58] C. J. Pehrson, *String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Rising Power Across the Asian Littoral*, Carlisle, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2006.
[59] N. Swanström, *op. cit.*, p. 18; J. Panda, *The Pipeline Dynamics in the Sino-Myanmar Honeymoon. Regional Contention and Strategic Fallout*, in "Policy Brief" (Institute for Security and Development Policy), 2010, No. 35, p. 3.
[60] C. R. Mohan, *Sittwe Port, India's N-E gateway via Myanmar, has China docking in too*, in "The Indian Express", 7th May 2006, URL: http://www.indianexpress.com/news/sittwe-port-india-s-ne-gateway-via-myanmar-has-china-docking-in-too/4015/.

biggest city and port of Eastern India. In addition to this, China is currently funding the construction of the road linking Yangon and Sittwe, which would provide a PRC with a direct access by land to the Bay of Bengal from Southern China.

The construction of a port in Kyaykypyu, Rakhine State, was announced in 2007 and China soon became the first investor in the project. In addition to this, since 2010 the PRC has been building a pipeline connecting Kyaykypyu with the Chinese city of Kunming, in the Southern Yunnan province, which will allow the country to directly get oil from Middle East passing through the Myanmar port and avoiding the Malacca Strait[61].

Image 5. "Chinese growing oil consumption" (source: US Energy Information Administration)



Myanmar's Coco Islands are located in the Northeastern Indian Ocean close to the India's Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The PRC allegedly established an intelligence station on Great Coco Island in 1992 to monitor Indian naval activity in the aforesaid Indian Islands and the Indian launch site at Sriharikota and the Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO) at Chandipur-on-sea. Recently the Chinese Army has been accused to be building another base on Little Coco Island; existence of the Chinese base remains questioned and uncertain[62].

Also the other giant is highly interested in the region: during the last two decades, India has practiced a silent and progressive expansion of its relations in the IOR, through versatile usage of diplomacy, military intervention, economic sops and hydrographical policy; when considered as

[61] Editor, *Relations with Myanmar. Less thunder out of China*, in "The Economist", 6th October 2012, URL: http://www.economist.com/node/21564279.

[62] Bureau report, *China says no base at Coco Islands*, in "Zeenews", 10th September 2010, URL: http://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/myanmar-says-no-chinese-base-at-coco-islands_562442.html; A. Selth, *Chinese Whispers: The Great Coco Island Mystery*, in "The Irrawaddy", 2007, Vol. 15, No. 1, URL: http://www2.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=6640&page=3.

a systematic strategy, Indian moves have been dubbed as "Indian Iron Curtain" (IIC)[63]. In an analogous way, this trend, when considered the first manifestation of a new strategy by Delhi, is immediately interpreted in its potential anti-Chinese function. The so called IIC, according to Chinese claims, is being built by India in anti-PRC function across the IOR, creating a potential barrier to China's access to the Strait of Malacca. India's Iron Curtain can possibly be framed within the wider "Look East" foreign policy whose first step took place in Singapore in 1991[64]. India has been playing the Look East policy with renewed commitment in the last decades, given its analogous interest of securing the shipping lines relevant to its trade route and the strategic necessity of containing Chinese expansion. Also India is strongly interested in the Strait of Malacca since 40% of its trade passes through it. As a consequence it is India's interest to increase its naval presence in the zone by improving relations with neighbouring states.

India's attentiveness in cultivating cordial relations with Myanmar must be interpreted also within this strategic frame, given the centrality that the geographical position of the country enjoys in the IOR. Delhi for sure was neither glad to assist to the opening to China of the Indian-financed port of Sittwe, nor to the progress of other Sino-Burmese economic-strategic ties. Burma is one of the fragile buffer-states dividing the two Asian giants so that if friendly is a precious defence against the expansionism of the other, but if lost can dangerously serve to the adversary as a stepping stone towards encirclement.

The two countries are inspired in their practice by two theories of the IOR which are analogous and

opposite, both of them claiming the area as their legitimate range of expansion. Indian commitmentin the IOR has been clearly declared as an objective in India's maritime military strategy and the Navy's 2004 maritime doctrine which identify the IOR as a place where «major powers of this century will seek a toehold» and where maintenance of stability is an Indian responsibility. On the other hand, the affirmation of Indian presence is perceived as threat by China, whose "revisionist" intent collides not only with Indian plans but also with the status quo established and maintained in the area by the US[65]. Behind China's SOP there are cogent national interest related to the need of guaranteeing the survival of the regime and the development speed of the economy. Both these tasks impose the satisfaction of the energy security requirements, and consequently controlling the IOR waters, as an absolute priority[66].

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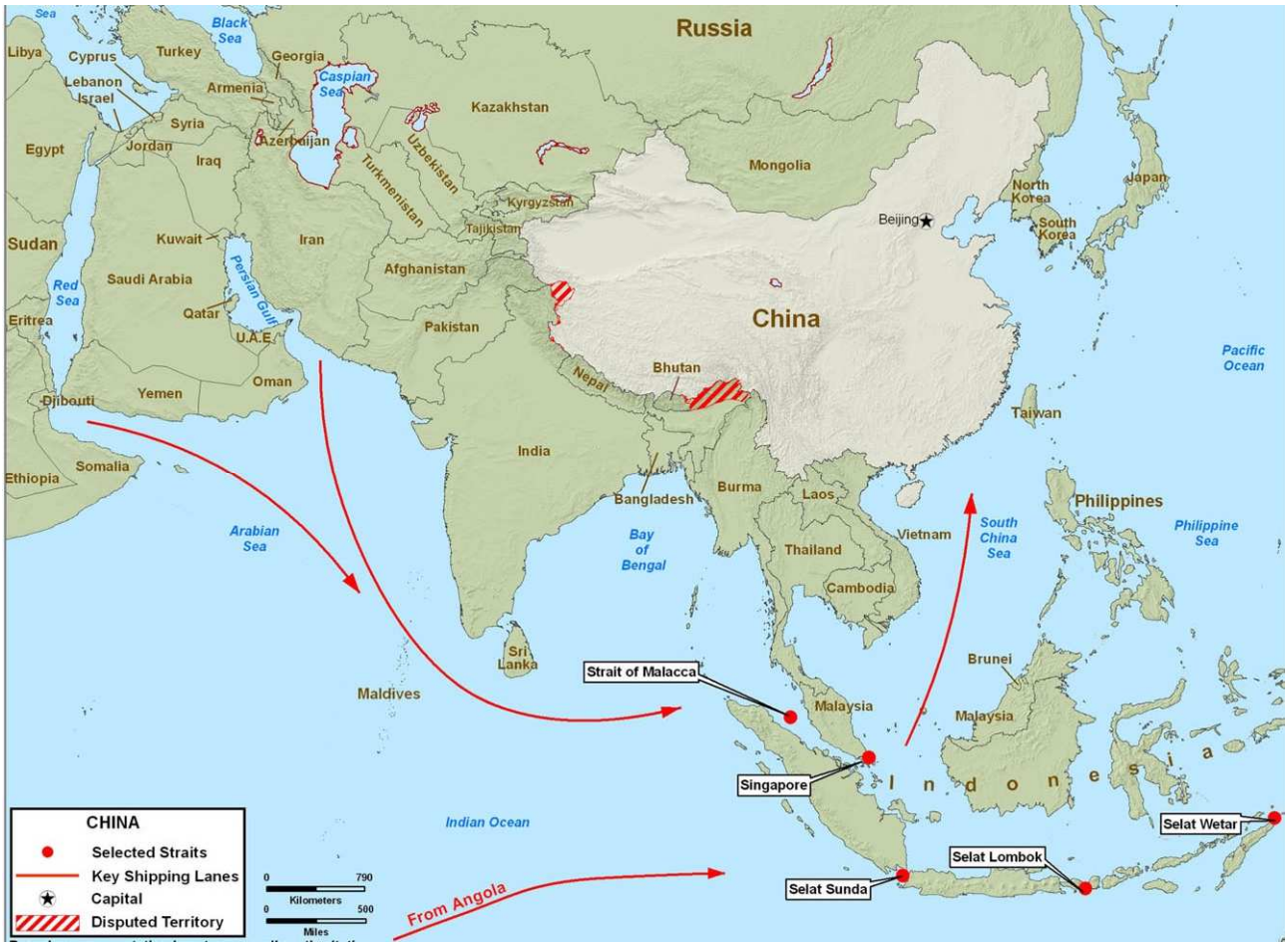
[63] C. R. B. Rai, *China's String of Pearls vs India's Iron Curtain*, in "Indian Defence Review", 2009, Vol. 24, No. 4, URL: http://www.indiandefencereview.com/spotlights/chinas-string-of-pearls-is-male-next/.
[64] Ibidem.
[65] C. J. Pehrson, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.
[66] N. Swanström, *op. cit.*, pp. 13-14.

Image 6. “SLOCs and China’s “Malacca dilemma” (source: http://www.gloria-center.org)



Given this background, Myanmar appears as a priority as well; Beijing demonstrated the relevance the country owns in a Chinese perspective by its attempt of exploiting Burmese natural resources, by various pipeline projects as well as by the construction of ports, whose first aim is to avoid China’s perennial “Malacca dilemma”[67], but whose military potential cannot be completely set aside[68]. To sum up, in nowadays strategic interests of China, Myanmar is not only considered as an important ally in terms of energy security, but also a potential asset in the competition with India for the hegemony in Asia[69].

III.2.2. Drug traffic and HIV

Opium cultivation in Burma has always been related to China; nowadays however the increase of drug criminality and HIV linked to the Burmese-produced heroin is representing a more and more challenging problem for the PRC government.

[67] Passim: *Economic interests: trade, investment and natural resources.*
[68] N. Swanström, *op. cit.*, pp. 17, 21, 25.
[69] Ivi, p. 17.

It is well known that opium was the instrument used by Western powers to penetrate the Chinese Empire and that, as a consequence of the massive amount of opium imported (especially by the British), until Mao Zedong came to power China was the main producer and user of the poppy. One of the immediate goals of the new Communist government was to eradicate the use and the cultivation of opium, as it was negatively affecting the productivity of the Chinese and the national development as a whole. The anti-opium campaign by the CCP was effective, but its results are now threatened by the huge heroin traffic which starts in the Golden Triangle, in Burma in particular.

Ironically, the production of opium in Burma has always been linked, in one or other way, to the Chinese. Before heroin became an extremely lucrative business like in contemporary times, opium used to be cultivated in the Northern region of Kokang, inhabited by various ethnic minorities, great number of them being of Chinese ancestry. The poppy cultivation was mainly destined to the private use of the same cultivators. The large scale production of heroin in Burma began following the trespassing of the GMD troops in 1950. In order to maintain their bases inside the country and to resist to the Chinese Communist forces, the GMD, backed by CIA, developed opium cultivation and heroin production as means of funding their military operations and control over the area. Opium then was the main resource of the anti-Communist forces, but very soon it became a fundamental revenue for the Burmese Communists as well. As mentioned, during and immediately after the Cultural Revolution, the CCP strengthen its links with the BCP, which obtained from Beijing consistent material support. But as the "Red diplomacy" faded away and Deng Xiaoping took back control over the foreign policy of China, the urgency of building new government-to-government relations necessarily reduced the support to the Communist parties of the area, including the BCP. The opium traffic became one of the few ways the BCP had to sustain its fight against Rangoon. In 1989 the BCP broke up into its different ethnic components, the Burman one returning to China. Through the mediation of a Kokang Chinese warlord, Lo Hsing Han, now the biggest trafficker in Burma, a cease-fire agreement was reached with General Khin Nyunt, the number one of the SLORC in power. The groups agreed not to ally with any insurgent force opposed to Rangoon, and the government gave them freedom to produce and traffic opiates. In sum, the groups ruling nowadays Burmese opium market are led by former CPB cadres, who in turn acquired their original power thanks to arms and training provided by China.

The Chinese link continues: most of the opium production still is located in the Kokang and the majority of drug warlords are Chinese born, ethnic Chinese or Sino-Burmese. The main traders are Yunnanese, as Yunnan lies just on the other side of the border, while financing comes from

Hong Kong and Taiwan[70]. China is also the major transit country for Burmese heroin: exported in Yunnan arrives to Kunming, the Chinese drug capital and from there, via Hong Kong, it reaches Taiwan, the US and other markets. Even the majority of the precursor substances to synthesize heroin originate from China. In 1990 China introduced stricter legislation and started collaborating with agencies such as the UN Drug Enforcement Administration and the UN Office for Drug Control; anti-narcotics campaigns however are not so effective without the collaboration of the Burmese government. The Chinese express frustration for the lack of efforts by the generals, whose carelessness is due to the cease-fire agreements negotiated by Khin Nyunt; the SLORC reached an accommodation with the insurgency exchanging drugs for peace: the connivance of the regime with the narco-traffickers is its logic consequence.

Chinese interest in containing trans-border drug traffic from Burma however is becoming more and more important for Beijing for a number of reasons.

The first one is drug-linked crime: an increasing percentage of criminality in China is related to the drug trafficking, especially in the province of Yunnan and Guangdong[71]. The second one is the drug addiction: heroin addiction and HIV contagion is spreading more and more in the country[72], with peaks in depressed regions like Xinjiang, were an increasing number of individuals belonging to the ethnic minority make use of hard drugs[73]. The spread of the disease is closely related to the traffic which takes place across the porous Sino-Burmese border. Along the trafficking and labour migration routes which link one side of the frontier with the other, together with large amounts of heroin, also HIV is exchanged, being needles sharing and unprotected sex its main channel of spreading[74]. Reports show that the subtype of virus spread along the Sino-Burmese border is the same which infects addict subject along the trafficking routes to Central Asia, passing through Xianjiang, and Guangxi[75]. The "export" of drug addiction and HIV from Burma to China is seen with increasing preoccupation by Chinese authorities since, besides its humanitarian consequences, could play a role in impeding or delaying Chinese economic development, as the African example demonstrates.

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[70] Ivi, p.11.
[71] D. Arnott, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
[72] UNAIDS, *China*, URL: http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/china/.
[73] B. Gill, S. Gang, *HIV/AIDS in Xinjiang: A Growing Regional Challenge*, in "China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly", 2006, Vol. 4, No. 3, pp. 35-50; A. Hayes, *HIV/AIDS in Xinjiang: a serious "ill " in an "autonomous" region*, in "IJAPS", 2012, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 77–102, URL: http://ijaps.usm.my/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/AnnaHayes-HIV-AIDS-Xinjiang.pdf.
[74] S. Lovvell, *The Old Burma Road: HIV traverses China's drug trafficking routes* (Video-reportage), http://www.sharron-lovell.com/?page_id=22.
[75] D. Arnott, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.

Also in this field China started collaborating with the UN agency UNAIDS and other international organizations, but the efforts of the PRC do not match with the negligence of the Burmese government[76], which refused even to admit the existence in Myanmar of an increasing number of infected subjects as a real problem[77].

III.2.3. Economic interests: trade, investment and natural resources

Trade

Chinese economic influence in Myanmar is strong particularly in the Northern region and in the border region, where the economy is a kind of sub-economy of the Yunnanese one. It is important however to distinguish in this regard the two different actors who are involved, the Beijing government and the province of Yunnan. Beijing would like to support a stable economic development while Yunnanese companies' practices often do not match such a path. The difference lies in the diverse conception that the two actors have of Myanmar's role with respect to China; while the central government considers Myanmar especially in its strategic potential, Yunnan is interested in short-term gains to be obtained through business. This is a very poor region and Burma is a golden land for its companies. China's economic advances in this sense cause great problem in terms of reputation, with Myanmar groups willing to offset Chinese business interests; great anti-Chinese sentiment grew among different subjects: minorities, governmental actors and opponents.

The establishment of closer economic ties between China and Myanmar in recent times was basically due to external factors: in terms of economic collaboration, rather than by geographical proximity or utilitarian reasons, Myanmar was "forced" to join hands with China by the isolation created around the generals by international boycotts. The Chinese role in the country however, though important, shall not be overestimated, remaining Thailand and other ASEAN countries important trading partners.

The official data proceeding from external sources reveal that there is no Chinese "economic domination" in Myanmar's economy; anyways, these statistics are undervalued since they refer only to the formal market, while large part of investment are directed in illegal activities – relative to strategic fields like natural resources and weapon industry– which remain obviously outside of the reports[78].

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[76] The Irrawaddy, *Burma's secret plague*, in "The Irrawaddy", 1997, Vol. 5, No. 4/5, URL: http://www2.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=791.

[77] UNAIDS, *Myanmar*, URL: http://www.unaids.org/en/regionscountries/countries/myanmar/; A. Zaw, *The AIDS embargo*, in "The Irrawaddy", 2002, Vol. 10, No. 1, URL: http://www2.irrawaddy.org/article.php?art_id=2503.

[78] N. Swanström, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

Investment and natural resources

Chinese interest in investing in Myanmar must be conceived as a consequence of the discovery in the country of precious natural resources, and their suitability to satisfy Chinese energy and security necessity. The increase in the investment can be also linked to China's "Go Global" policy. Access to Myanmar's resources was made easier by the international sanction addressed to Myanmar, which dramatically reduced the competition among potential investors.

As mentioned, Chinese booming economy depends on the successful supply of great amounts of energy and raw materials. The satisfaction of these "energy security" requirements is fundamental also under the "national security" point of view: Chinese economic successful development is fundamental to the perpetuation of the CCP regime; not to let the PRC breakdown then the Party sees the provision of energy as a national priority. The issue acquires strategic relevance as well considering the risks faced by the PRC during the transportation of these resources, oil in particular. China is currently importing oil in three ways: through the Sino-Kazakhstan pipeline, through the Sino-Russian pipeline and, for 80% of the total, by shipping through the Indian Ocean[79]. Therefore China is highly dependent on the Strait of Malacca, which represents the shortest way from the IOR to mainland China but still remains out of PRC's control (the so-called "Malacca dilemma")[80].

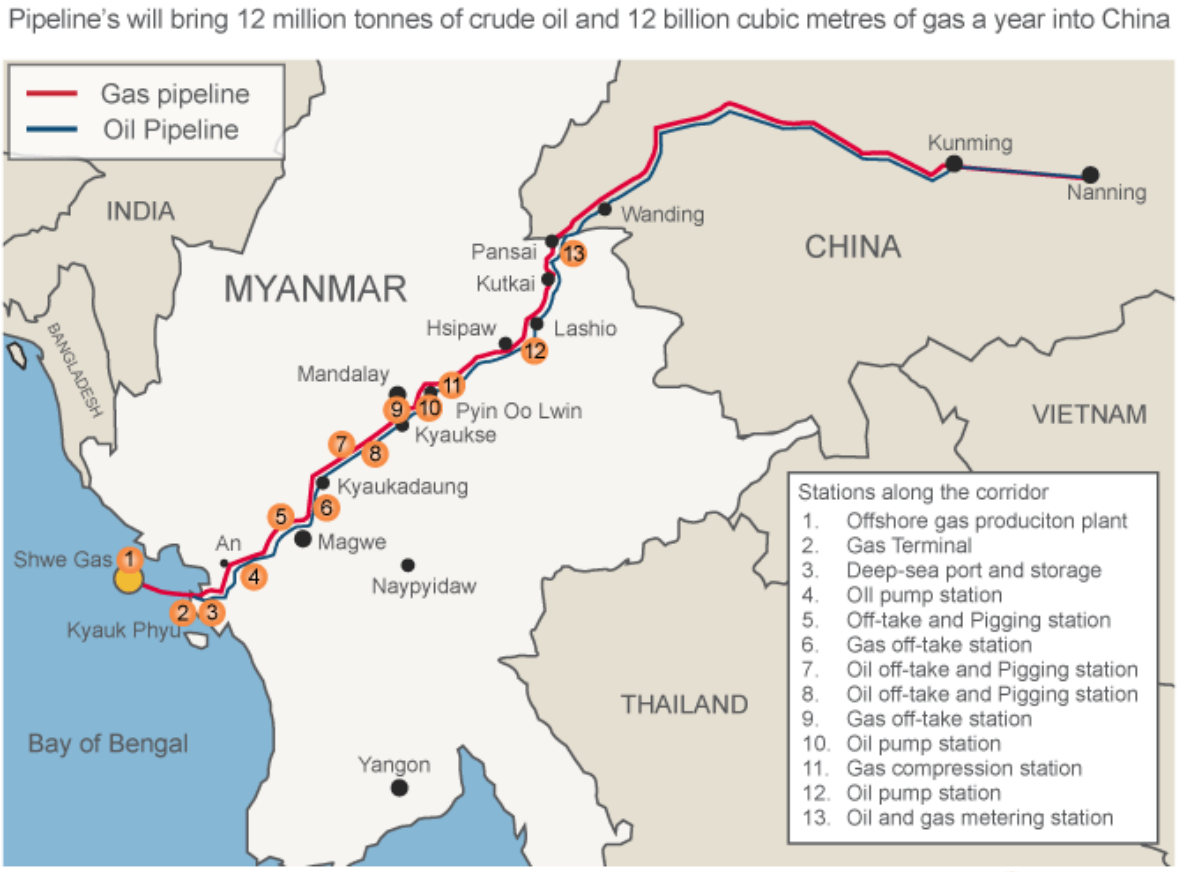
The investments in Myanmar's natural resources well represented the "Go Global" policy introduced since 1999 by the PRC, as part of the 10th "Five Year Plan", aimed to encourage foreign investment by Chinese firms[81]. Previously, due to restriction towards embarking in Foreign Direct Investments (FDI) Chinese companies used to concentrate on domestic market.

However, the urgency of securing long-term suppliers of resources brought to the necessity of promoting outward FDI. Myanmar represented an appealing opportunity due to its precious resources and to its relative availability: having only a few countries investing, China easily became its main investor, becoming as a consequence also major international player in Myanmar[82].

[79] J. Panda, *op. cit.*, p. 1.
[80] R. Sutter, *op. cit.*, pp. 34, 38; C. J. Pehrson, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-7.
[81] T. Mitchell, *Chinese Foreign Direct Investment in Myanmar: Remarkable Trends and Multilayered Motivations* (Thesis), Lund, Lund University, 2012, URL: http://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/o.o.i.s?id=24965&postid=2756649, p. 39.
[82] Ivi, p. 40.

Earth Rights International identifies about 69 Chinese multinationals involved in at least 90 hydropower, oil, gas and mining projects in Myanmar[83].

Image 7. "China's Trans-Myanmar oil-gas pipelines" (source: shwe.org)



In terms of oil and gas pipelines the two major projects are the Shwe Natural Gas Project and the Burma-China Pipeline[84]. These pipelines, whose construction was decided in 2009 and started in 2010 would link the port of Kyaukypyu with the Yunnanese city of Kunming. The implant will transport 22 million tons of oil and 12 billion cubic metres of gas per year[85].

China was motivated by different factors in participating, together with South Korea, India and Burmese enterprises, to the projects: first of all, reducing China's dependence on the Strait of Malacca, they increase China's security. Secondarily, they improve oil provision for the Province of Yunnan where, due to the high transportation costs, oil products are more expensive

[83] EarthRights International (ERI), *China in Burma: The increasing Investment of Chinese Multinational Corporations in Burma's Hydropower, Oil and Natural Gas and Mining Sectors*, 2008, URL: http://www.earthrights.org/publication/china-burma-increasing-investment-chinese-multinational-corporations-burmas-hydropower-o, p. 1.

[84] J. Panda, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-3; EarthRights International (ERI), *The Burma-China Pipelines: Human Rights Violations, Applicable Law, and Revenue Secrecy*, 2011, URL: http://www.earthrights.org/sites/default/files/documents/the-burma-china-pipelines.pdf.

[85] T. Mitchell, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

and frequently scarce[86]. In addition to this, the PRC employs its own citizens as workers, creating jobs and richness which will be probably re-spent back in China (worsening at the same time the perception of Chinese FDI by local residents)[87].

In sum, the pipeline creates net benefits for Beijing; Naypydaw is advantaged by the fact that, being in debt with China, the product of the project could help to balance its payments.

The biggest mining project is represented by Taguang Taung Nickel Ore Project Mining System started in 2011. The nickel extracted will not be used in Myanmar, but exported to China[88].

Myitsone Dam is the most important hydropower dam projected by the two countries. Also in this case, the biggest amount of the energy produced will be exported to China, though great number of Myanmarese suffer for electricity shortage[89]. The government of Thein Sein suddenly suspended the project in September 2011 adducing environmental concerns, causing great surprise in Beijing[90].

In sum, China is aiming to gain concessions in this potential market, just like Thailand and India did. Myanmar shown to have elected no particular country as favourite partner, but gave advantage to China in comparison with India under some points of view.

From a Chinese perspective, Myanmar's resources are the solution to PRC's energy and national security problems, as they allow China to get resources from a close source eliminating transportation expenses and political uncertainty in the Middle East as well as the "Malacca dilemma", still out of the control of the CCP. At the same time the creation of closer economic ties with Burma enables China to strengthen its influence and to secure the country as an ally.

The Chinese FDI in Burma create a dependency effect: even though China plays the dominant role, China remains in need of Myanmar's concessions. It is a reciprocal dependence: China needs what Myanmar has but possesses the capital necessary to exploit these resources; Myanmar possesses the resources but needs Chinese funding, especially considering the situation of international isolation which is living[91].

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[86] Ivi, p. 49.
[87] Ivi, pp. 49-50.
[88] Ivi, p. 51.
[89] DVB, *Electric Power Ministry promises to review price hike*, in "Democratic Voice of Burma", 11th November 2013, URL: http://www.dvb.no/news/electric-power-minister-promises-to-review-price-hike-myanmar-burma/34323.
[90] M. Kha, *60% of investment already paid for suspended Mytsone Dam: Chinese Developer*, in "The Irrawaddy", 5th September 2013, URL: http://www.irrawaddy.org/burma/60-of-investment-already-paid-for-suspended-myitsone-dam-chinese-developer.html; H. Hindstrom, *Chinese "confident" Burma will re-open Mytsone Dam*, in "Democratic Voice of Burma", 5th September 2013, URL: http://www.dvb.no/news/chinese-confident-burma-will-re-open-myitsone-dam-myanmar-environment-china-hydropower/32256.
[91] T. Mitchell, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-54.

Image 8. “Myitsione dam” (source: www.chiangraitimes.com)

The benefit of both the players then depends on their mutual collaboration. However the unilateral suspension of the Myitsone Dam project by Naypidaw confirms the unpredictability of Myanmar’s behaviour while China could be, because of that, less willing to assist the country in the future[92].

The Border and the immigration problems

The porous border dividing Burma and China has always been a constant problem in the bilateral relations between the two countries. The area which extends on both the sides of the frontier has always been a crossroads of different people and it is inhabited still today by a mosaic of ethnic minority, great number of which are Chinese. Though the demarcation of the border has been fixed with the Border Treaty in 1960, it has maintained its fluidity and many Chinese proceeding from the poor Southern countryside decide to cross it in force of familiar or ethnic ties, and to settle. The Chinese immigration, which became a massive phenomenon during the British domination, has continued until recent days, giving birth to a number of consequences.

The Chinese, following their trend to create ethnic areas within the city of settlement, have created real ghettoes in numerous cities. The greatest example is Mandalay, Burma’s Chinese hub, where, according to Mya Maung, the city is now «owned by Yunnanese and ethnic Chinese merchants», while the «relatively poor ethnic Burmese of Mandalay have been congregated» in

[92] N. Swanström, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

«new satellite towns built by the SLORC on the outskirt of Mandalay»[93]. Urban phenomena like this contribute to create a strong anti-Chinese sentiment among the Burmese, who in the past gave demonstration of their intolerance towards "bulky" immigrants during the anti-Indian and the anti-Chinese riots respectively in 1930 and 1967. Some consider that a new wave of anti-Chinese violence is not unlikely to happen: the increasing and often aggressive presence of Chinese investors in the economy of the country points out that China holds a considerable economic stake in Burma and many fear that this could make it become a Chinese colony. China is considered to have changed the demographic balance of Myanmar and to have contributed to worsen the status of Burmese light industry through the importation of cheap Chinese goods[94], welcomed by the generals as a solution for the lack of consumer goods suffered by the country in various occasions[95].

Given the considerable magnitude of Chinese immigrant flux towards Burma, Litner came to interpret Chinese migration as nothing less than a demographic strategy used by China to sustain its emergence as Asian world power[96]. As a matter of fact, the PRC is well accustomed to the use of the overwhelming demographic power of the Chinese majority to establish the central government's control over periphery or ethnic areas; this would make the speculation about its application outside the national borders not so improbable. Conjectures apart, China's proximity, revealed also through its demographic presence, keeps representing an important variable in Burmese domestic affairs.

III.3. Assessing China's Burma policy

Chinese policy towards Burma since the foundation of the PRC seemed to be articulated into four main moments[97].

In the phase immediately following the establishment of the Communist rule in China, Chinese foreign policy was influenced by strong and as a consequence U Nu's Burma, guilty of being unwilling to shift left, was attacked as reactionary nation affiliated to the USA. In this phase China opposed Burmese government and supported its breakdown by revolutionary forces.

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[93] M. Maung, *On the Road to Mandalay: A Case Study of the Sinonization of Upper Burma*, in "Asian Survey", 1994, Vol. 34, No. 5, pp. 447-459, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2645057, pp. 448, 455.
[94] D. Arnott, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
[95] R. A. Holmes, *China-Burma Relations*…, cit., p. 697.
[96] Quoted in D. Arnott, *op. cit.*, p. 80.
[97] W. Bert, *op. cit.*, p. 963.

The second phase started in the early 1950s and extended until the late 1960s. In this period the PRC lowered its initial tones and adopted a more conciliatory policy along with Bandung spirit of coexistence and neutralism, motivated by the intention of increasing Chinese influence in the Third World. From the point of view of the Sino-Burmese relations, this meant the end of the virulent attacks of the early 1950s and renewed efforts in highlighting the natural friendship existing between the two countries due to long-lasting cultural ties. The representation of Burma within the Chinese propaganda drastically changed: from nation servant to Western capitalism, it became a neutral state struggling in its anti-imperialist resistance. The restored peace with Rangoon served to Chinese foreign policy interests, namely to reward the country for not having slipped in the western block and keep it friendly, unwilling to embark in moves which could be contrary to Chinese positions.

The peaceful coexistence was suddenly broken by the emergence of the Cultural Revolution. As the Red Guard seized power in Beijing, also Chinese foreign policy became “red” and the CCP started giving direct support to the White Flag Communists whose commitment was to overthrow the government in Rangoon. The red diplomacy put in practice by China reached its peak in the mid of the year 1967 when the PRC explicitly accused the Burmese government and called for the mobilization of the overseas Chinese in support of the ongoing Cultural Revolution. Such a hostile policy extended for the following two years and contributed to alienate the support of the Burmese.

As the Cultural Revolution enthusiasm faded, the PRC started working for a return to normality, both in the domestic arena and in the international one. This implied restoring the *status quo ante* with Myanmar, symbolized by the visit by Prime Minister Ne Win to Beijing in August 1971.

The end of ideological extremism was synthesized by China’s “dual diplomacy”, an attempt to save the new-built government-to-government relation without scarifying the affiliation of brother-parties. China however soon realized that continuing with the support of national communist forces was not worth as a strategy, and that relations with the governments were to be prioritized. Realistically, the CCP abandoned the BCP and started building closer and closer ties with Rangoon, especially after the 1988 coup.

On the Burmese side instead, two major phases of foreign policy towards China can be pointed out, interestingly unrelated to the correspondent variations of Beijing’s policy, at least in appearance. From independence to 1962 Burma was relatively open in terms of culture, politics and economy and cultivated diverse diplomatic relations. Within the country the different hegemonic powers competed in spreading their propaganda material. But after General Ne Win sized power with a coup in 1962 foreign investment stopped, economy was subjected to

nationalization and also diplomatic activity stagnated. As Burma remained more and more isolated, China progressively emerged as the country's most important aid supplier.

As mentioned, there is no evident relation between the changes of Chinese Burma's policy and Burma's shift from an open to a closed society. Chinese policy towards Burma was stable and friendly at the beginning of the 1960s and cannot be considered the cause of Burma's transformation. At the same time Burma's change was not the determinant element which contributed to Chinese hostility during and immediately after the Cultural Revolution. As a proof it can be noted that China's Red diplomacy was addressed not only to Burma but was analogous also towards other Asian countries. The "rift" between Burma and China occurred in 1967 should be rather interpreted as product of Beijing's frustration over its failure in extending its political and economical hegemony over the country[98]. From a Burmese point of view in turn, it was the manifestation of Rangoon's success in maintaining its neutrality and independence from any bloc, included the "Maoist" one.

With the beginning of Ne Win's era the reciprocal relations proved to be positive: Chinese have demonstrated in a variety of ways their willingness to be friendly and build further relations. This opening to Burma was not determined by a sincere concern about its interest of course, but by pure "realist" calculation. As China perceived Burma's fear not to provoke its reaction, it decided to use conciliatory means rather than hostile ones to secure its collaboration. As Bert remarkably writes: «It is because the Chinese recognize that the Burmese are anxious to placate them that they prefer to ensure, by the use of the carrot rather than the stick, that Burma remains a good neighbour»[99].

That happened: Chinese appeasement reached its targets, with the exception of some "affronts" which Burma retained necessary to keep affirming its non alignment and prevent its neutralism to become a "leaning" one, a neutralism that, anyways, was mainly due to China's bulky proximity.

Generally speaking, Burmese political leaders have engaged in preserving positive relations with Beijing, also through that neutralism Beijing itself found so irritating. A constant feature of Burma's foreign policy indeed was the attention not to join any project which could be perceived as threatening by China. This passed often through the adoption of a neutralist position in international affairs, refusing even regionalism as a concession to the US.

As a consequence, the two main interest which influenced Burma's relation with China and the rest of the regional actors have been the effort not to offend and provoke China and, at the same

[98] R. A. Holmes, *Burma's Foreign Policy.…*, cit., pp. 245, 249.
[99] W. Bert, *op. cit.*, p. 968.

time, the determination to preserve itself from an overwhelming Chinese influence. Burma's historical neutralism served both the scopes.

This did not allow China to obtain its full target, i.e. making Myanmar a client state, but allowed both the countries to maintain generally positive relations; the overall effect of this was a contribution by China to the survival of the Burmese authoritarian regime; this joining hands between the Chinese and the Burmese authoritarianism was not due to ideological affinity but to realistic geopolitical interest by both. China in particular, after having (partly in vain) sought Burma's alliance in its competition with other hegemonic powers in the region, is now doing the same to secure its energy needs and to expand, again, its influence in the region, not vis-à-vis USSR and the US, but against a rising India and, secondarily, a declining US.

Myanmar's position towards China seems to be somewhat coherent with its past, mixing availability towards Beijing with a certain amount of unpredictability. Myanmar's management of the Myitsone Dam project, valuable several billion dollars for the Chinese, represents the latest proof of the fact that, though the poor and isolated Myanmar is willing to collaborate with China in order to get the material support needed, the generals do not want to allow Beijing to influence decision-making in Myanmar beyond a certain extent[100].

In this light, new questions arise: are there the conditions for China to eventually review its Burma's policy? In force of the interests currently held by Beijing in Myanmar, is still a persistent support to the generals' regime the first best or could a change of regime represent an asset for Chinese stake?

[100] R. Sutter, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

Chapter IV
"India and Burma"

IV.1. India-Burma relations

IV.1.1. Close ties and support for democracy (1948-1962)

Burma is linked to India in force of an ancient and strong bound which includes different aspects, from the cultural to the political.

First of all, India was the cradle of the religions which became dominant in Burma: Hinduism, which strongly influenced Burmese liturgy and ethics, originated from India as well as Theravada Buddhism, which arrived to Myanmar spreading from the subcontinent through Sri Lanka. Pali, the language of the Theravada Buddhist canon, is an Indo-Aryan language indigenous of India.

Under the political point of view the Indian legacy dates back to the time of the Pagan Empires, who developed the first Burmese law codes, the *Dhammathat*, which are the major sources of Burmese legal theory and were derived from Indian ones[1]. The international relations between the two countries date back to the time of the Arakanese kings, who, for a period of time, ruled over the port city of Chittagong, in present day Bangladesh, and over the region which nowadays is the Indian Northeastern state of Manipur. The monarchs of Arakan had close relations with the Bengali sultans, so that, following dynastic upheavals, royal troops proceeding from India settled in Northwest Burma, creating the precedents of the nowadays Rohingya people, the biggest Muslim Bengali-descent minority of the country[2].

As widely exposed in the previous chapters, the ties between India and Burma became stronger during the British rule, which represented not only a common experience in the national history of the two countries, but also made them a unique political entity, since colonial Burma was

[1] T. Mynt, *Challenges Facing "State" Building in Burma: Law and Legal Dimension*, 2008, Indiana University, pp. 1-8.
[2] Passim: *Ch. I:: Ethnicity: Main minority ethnicities: Rakhane and Rohingya*.

administrated as part of British India. The exchange between the two countries intensified notably and the Indian presence in the country became evident, with a great number of Indians entering Burma to be employed in the colonial administration of the province and in various productive sectors. This contributed to the development by the Burmese of a certain racist and xenophobic sentiment towards these South Asian immigrants, known as *kaalas*[3].

However, at the level of official politics, the two countries associated in their common fight for independence from the colonial rule. The Indian National Congress always shown sympathy towards Burmese nationalists and, after Burma separated from India becoming a province apart within the British Empire, the respective leaders supported each other in their struggle. This was made possible also by the friendliness existing between the Indian and Burmese leaders; while Aung San was Vice President of the Executive Council in Burma Nehru was Vice President of the Executive Council in India and the two statesmen developed, besides their official association, reciprocal esteem[4]. As the news about the assassination of Aung San reached Delhi, Nehru issued a statement in which he lamented the death of the General and promised full Indian support for the people of Burma. When the country had to prepare its first constitution as an independent nation, Narsing Benegal Rau, distinguished Indian constitutionalist, was placed at the disposal of the Burmese Constituent Assembly to support it during the drafting works[5].

The story of India and Burma proceeded in parallel also in the liberation from the colonial yoke: India became independent on the 15th August 1947 and Burma in the 4th January 1948. On this day, Prime Minister Nehru, saluted Burmese independence as an important achievement not only for the country, but also for India and whole Asia.

The close ties between the two governments continued also thanks to the fact that Nehru and the *thankin* called to guide Burma after Aung San's departure, U Nu, developed a personal friendship besides the cordial relations they entertained as heads of the states[6].

This was a phase, in the history of Indo-Burmese relations, of harmony and reciprocal support, especially from India in favour of Burma.

The relations remained positive even when Burmese domestic politics affected the citizens of Indian origin living in the country. The fate of these people was in this period the principal issue

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[3] Ibidem.

[4] PTI, *When Nehru arranged warm dresses for Suu Kyi's father for London winter*, in "Hindustan Times", 14th November 2012, URL: http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/newdelhi/when-nehru-arranged-warm-dresses-for-suu-kyi-s-father-for-london-winter/article1-959245.aspx.

[5] B. K. Sen, *Burma greets Indian Republic*, in "Mizzima", 26th January 2000.

[6] T. Thin Aung, S. Mynt, *India-Burma relations*, in AA.VV., *Challenges to Democratization in Burma, perspectives of multilateral and bilateral responses*, Stockholm, 2001, International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, URL: http://www.idea.int/asia_pacific/burma/, p. 89.

in the relation between the two governments. In order to reinforce Burmese business and restore a class of Burmese entrepreneurs, the U Nu government adopted a number of measures which favoured the ethnic Burmese at the expense of the others. Obviously the most affected were the Indians, since they constituted the greatest part of the middle class of Burma, largely controlling the correspondent economic activities[7]. In particular, among the various law approved by the government, Indians' status was touched by the 1946 *Land Alienation Act*, which allowed the alienation of land only in favour of Burmese citizens, and the 1949 *Burma Land Nationalization Bill*. The measures caused great protest among both Indian and Burmese Indians but Nehru accepted their adoption, though claiming a fair compensation for the victims, and did not let the event ruin the relations with the Burmese government[8].

During these years Burma continued to benefit from its relation with India, its greatest rice importer, and to receive important financial and military aid in the first difficult post-independence years. As in 1949 Rangoon needed money to promote counter-insurgency campaigns, India promoted the conference of the governments of the Commonwealth countries in New Delhi at this purpose; the result of the meeting was a loan of 6 millions pounds, out of them 1 million contributed by Delhi[9]. Moreover in the same year India sold arms and six helicopters, necessary to Rangoon to fight the rebels[10]. Finally, India announced in 1950 another special loan of Rs 5 million to Burma. These acts demonstrated that Delhi soon forgot about the fate of Burmese Indians and that the event was not influential in the maintenance of good relations with Burma. Nehru and U Nu held regular consultations and inaugurated a dialogue about bilateral and international issues, while Indian and Burmese neutralism of both began to emerge[11]. In 1949 India allowed Burma to be the first nation not belonging to the communist bloc to recognize the People's Republic of China, which happened on the 18th December 1949, with Delhi immediately following on the 31th of the same month[12].

A *Treaty of Friendship* was signed in New Delhi on 7th July 1951, coming into force in January of the next year. The agreement was motivated by the desire of «strengthening and developing the many ties that have bound the two countries for centuries», «need for maintaining the peace

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[7] M. Charney, *A History of Modern Burma*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 82.
[8] I. Singh, *Between two fires. Towards and understanding of Jawaharlal Nehru's foreign policy*, New Delhi, Orient Longman Limited, 1998, Vol. II, pp.162-163.
[9] J. S. Thomson, *Burmese Neutralism*, in "Political Science Quarterly", 1975, Vol. 72, No. 2, pp. 261-283, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2145776, p. 272.
[10] S. Mynt, *Burma File. A question of democracy*, Singapore, India Research Press/Marshall Cavedish, 2004, p. 89.
[11] J. S. Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 262-270.
[12] T. Thin Aung, S. Mynt, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

and friendship that have always existed between the two States»[13]; in particular, in Art.I the signers recognized their reciprocal independence; Art. II stated that the relations between the two shall be marked by «everlasting peace and unalterable friendship»; in Art. IV «The two States agree that their representatives shall meet from time to time and as often as occasion requires to exchange views on matters of common interest and to consider ways and means for mutual cooperation in such matters»[14], stabilizing the pattern of the consultations already in practice[15].

A Trade Agreement between India and Burma was also signed on the 29th September, 1951. According to the deal Burma «agreed to export 350,000 tons of rice to India annually in exchange for jute goods, textiles, oil and steel products from India»[16].

In September 1949, due to the permanence of GMD troops on Burmese soil, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) approached the Northeastern Sino-Burmese border, causing in Rangoon the fear that, taking advantage of the GMD issue, the Chinese Communists could enter the country. As the Burmese government decided to seek a solution to the case through the UN, India strongly supported such a choice, both within the international organization and outside it[17].

The season of the Afro-Asian conferences then began. As the Cold War was emerging, Nehru and U Nu strengthen further the Indo-Burmese connection through their common adoption of neutralism as a posture in the conduction of foreign affairs (though in the Burmese case it did not implied the adherence to the non-alignment bloc[18]) and through their role of champions of the Asian solidarity[19].

IV.1.2. The emergence of the border issue and the decline of the Indo-Burmese harmony (1962-1988)

Until the beginning of the 1960s heads of state in Delhi and Rangoon demonstrated to be good friends and loyal allies, but this idyllic situation was progressively tilted by the emergence of a

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[13] Ministry of External Affairs, *Treaty of Friendship between India and the Union of Burma, 17th July 1951*, in "Commonwealth Legal Information Institute", URL: http://www.commonlii.org/in/other/treaties/INTSer/1951/12.html.

[14] Ibidem.

[15] T. Thin Aung, S. Mynt, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

[16] Ministry of External Affairs, *Government of India, Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, 1951-1952, URL: http://mealib.nic.in/?999907, p. 6.

[17] J. S. Thomson, *op. cit.*, p. 275.

[18] F. N. Trager, *Burma's Foreign Policy, 1948-56: Neutralism, Third Force, and Rice*, in "The Journal of Asian Studies", 1956, Vol. 16, No. 1, pp. 89-102, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2941548, pp. 96-99.

[19] B. G. Gokhale, *The Failure of Nehru's Asianism*, in S. Mathur, S. Goyal (eds.), *Spectrum of Nehru's Thought*, New Delhi, Mittal Publications, 1994, pp. 97-115.

wide border problem involving the Indo-Burmese-Sino triangle which lies in the North of Myanmar.

The problem resulted as the effect on Indo-Burmese relations of the wider change occurring since 1962 in Burma's foreign policy towards China. As Rangoon seemed to get closer to Beijing, this consequently affected its relations with Delhi.

On January 1960 the caretaker government of General Ne Win signed with the PRC a Border Treaty and a Treaty of friendship and mutual non-aggression[20], agreements which pointed out the new propensity of the General towards his Chinese counterparts.

The move did not escape the attention of the Indian policy makers, who interpreted it as a Chinese attempt of wooing Rangoon. This was the very moment in which India started giving new strategic importance to Burma, as a potential asset in the containment of China or as a dangerous launching board for Chinese expansion towards India itself. Previously India did no perceive Myanmar as plausible ally of China due to General's Ne Win neutralist posture in international affairs, and consequently underestimated the strategic potential of the country in the Indo-Chinese dynamics.

Soon after, in October 1962 the border conflict between the two giants broke out, and the Sino-Indian War began[21].

Burma, territorially and politically "sandwiched" between the two opponents, in the attempt of avoiding an excessive involvement in the conflict and the hostility of either of the neighbours, chase the less evil, i.e. remained neutral.

The non-involvement of Burma however was interpreted by India as expression of Burmese recent pro-Chinese propensity, and the Delhi-Rangoon axis was negatively affected.

Since 1962 until 1988 the relations between the two countries, having lost the previous harmony, cooled down and had a fluctuant trend, with moments of down followed by improvements. The Chinese factor was always central in the Indo-Burmese dynamics, which frequently appeared as a repercussion of the new Chinese engagement in Myanmar.

In February 1964 Ne Win visited Delhi where received Nehru's request of supporting India's proposal for a conference of non-aligned nations to be held in Cairo with the exclusion of the PRC. Few days later the Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and Foreign Minister Chen Yi visited the General in Rangoon, asking Burmese backing for an Afro-Asian conference to discuss Sino-Indian border issue; the General however again refused to take the part of either of the two

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[20] Passim, *Ch. III: China-Burma relations: from the PRC to the Cultural Revolution.*

[21] N. Maxwell, *India's China War*, New York, Pantheon Books, 1970, pp. 37-52.

contenders and urged them to adopt the recommendations of the nations gathered in Colombo in December 1962[22].

The maintenance of cordial relations was facilitated by the existence of a good relationship between the Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, who had taken the place of the father, and General Ne Win, though this did not permit to go back the previous *status quo*, and overall relations remained formal.

The lowest point of Indo-Burmese relations was registered during the same year, when General Ne Win promoted a series of nationalization which, as under the previous government, negatively affected the Burmese Indian community; in this case however the nationalization were so strong and the treatment Indians received from the government so harsh that the situation almost reached a breaking point. The government did not pay any compensation to those who were expropriated and did not arrange any facility to allow their repatriation. Those who decided to go back to India by their own means were not allowed to bring with them any of their belongings.

At the end of the same year the status of the bilateral relations seemed to have improved, especially due to the worsening on the Sino-Burmese front. China's support to the BCP and the insurgents caused mistrust and irritation in the government and the progressive estrangement of Rangoon and Beijing led to the famous anti-Chinese riots which broke out in Burma in 1967 and marked one of the lowest point in the relations between Myanmar and the PRC. The relative rapprochement seemed to be confirmed by a joint communiqué issued in Delhi as a consequence of the visit performed by Ne Win in February 1965; the document affirmed the good status of the bilateral relations and the common interest in pursuing a policy of non-alignment.

In March 1967 a boundary agreement was signed, which provided to the settlement of the boundary in its whole length.

Two years later the General paid another visit to Indira Gandhi and the topic of the meeting was believed to be a discussion about the potential collaboration between India and Myanmar in countering the threatening expansionist policy of China. The PRC expressed its disapproval towards Burma and kept accusing Rangoon (this was the aftermath of the rift between Rangoon and Beijing and the pacification between the generals and the PRC was yet to come).

[22] R. A. Holmes, *Burma's Foreign Policy Toward China Since 1962*, in "Pacific Affairs", 1972, Vol. 45, No. 2, pp. 240-254, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2755554, p. 244.

In economical terms, however, the situation worsen during the 1960s as China replaced India as the first importer of Burmese rice and there was no notable increase in the trade between the two countries despite a trade agreement signed in December 1962 in Rangoon.

In August 1974 a payment agreement stated that India would have supplied Burma with a number of products worth Rs 75 million and in 1979 India allocated Rs 21.7 million for 21 pilot projects in various fields.

Though Burma's foreign policy was an isolationist one, starting from the end of the 1970s its neutralism seemed to be "leaning" towards China, while at the same time cultivating other relations –like with the United State and West Germany– in order to mitigate Chinese influence. Despite its policy, during the Seventies Indian Ministers kept paying official visits to Burma; in December 1987 it was the turn of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, but no improvement was registered.

Meanwhile, from 1974 to 1980 India gave shelter to exiled U Nu: though offering political asylum to Ne Win's opponent could be counterproductive in the attempt of building closer ties with the General, Delhi finally accepted the request in compliance of the friendship which existed between him with India's first Prime Minister.

IV.1.3. Approaching the generals (1988-present)

In 1988 the Indo-Burmese relations reached their lowest point due to the strong support India gave to the 8-8-88 protest which broke out in Burma[23]. India was the country sharing a border with Burma to take the side of the protestors and condemn the government. The Indian Embassy in Rangoon offered important material support: in order to help the activists, it kept in contact with the All Burma Federation of Students' Union, Aung San Suu Kyi and U Nu; in addition to this, it offered shelter to those who jumped its fence looking for protection and arranged an emergency hospital in the building[24]. Moreover, the Embassy provided financial assistance to those who fled to the Indo-Burmese border and helped them to enter India. The government opened refugee camps in the border states of Mizoram and Manipur[25].

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[23] D. I. Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar. What everyone needs to know*, 2010, Oxford, Oxford University Press, pp. 77-78;
R. Egreteau, *The repression of the August 8-12, 1988 (8-8-88) uprising in Burma/Myanmar*, in "Online Encyclopedia of Mass Violence", Stable URL: http://www.massviolence.org/Article?id_article=303.
[24] T. Thin Aung, S. Mynt, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
[25] Ivi, p. 108.

At the international level, Delhi joined the coalition of Western countries who isolated the regime and sponsored its condemn within the United Nation, which occurred with the Resolution 47/144 of December 1992[26].

However, after this dramatic split-up with Rangoon, at the beginning of the 1990s itself Delhi tried to restore positive relations with the regime. This sudden turnabout was due in first stance to the emergence of problems along the Indo-Burmese border; in addition to such an issue, whose resolution was strictly dependent on Rangoon's collaboration, evolutions in Indian economic and strategic foreign policy determined the change of direction. In particular, India realized that a friendly Burma was essential to fulfil its new goals, namely: a more globalized economy, to be realized first of all through an opening towards Southeast Asia; further engagement in the region to counter Chinese influence. Policy makers in New Delhi then decided that their initial and natural commitment to the support of the pro-democracy movement had to be sacrificed to the benefit of more urgent national interests. Indian interests matched the Burmese ones, as the ostracized junta was looking for recognition, especially by Asian countries.

The rapprochement with the generals was immediately evident, but the distancing from the pro-democracy movement was progressive: the new engagement with the military junta initially coexisted with the support to their opponents, which became less and less open and consistent, but without disappearing completely.

As mentioned, the most urgent Burma-related issue that the Indian government had to deal with was the managing of the refugees and of the insurgents located along the Indo-Burmese boundary.

At the beginning of the 1990s the junta intensified its military activity along the border, a territory where the effectiveness of the governmental authority has always been challenged by the actual control exercised by ethnic-based rebel armies. The clash between regular forces and rebels generated waves of refugees heading towards the neighbouring countries. Many of them sought shelter across the Indian border; in particular in 1992 the Burmese Naga fled to Nagaland due to the ethnic ties existing with the Indian minority settled in this state, located in the Northeast of the Indian Republic and shook by secessionist resistance. Delhi protested with Rangoon and asked to stop violence against the villagers settled on the border, finally obtaining collaboration for the repatriation of the refugees. In addition to the solution of this particular event, India realized that the cooperation of Rangoon was necessary to solve the long-term

[26] United Nations General Assembly, *Situation in Myanmar, A/RES/47/144*, 18th December 1992, http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/47/a47r144.htm.

border issue of the Indian Northeast, as many groups fighting for independence from Delhi used to flee beyond the frontier and establish camps in Burmese territory. The most well-known of the joint Indo-Burmese military operations against border insurgency was the Operation Golden Bird, launched against the Indian rebels of the Northeast in July 1995, famous for having been abandoned by the *Tatmadaw* as Delhi government announced the conferment of the Nehru Award to Aung San Suu Kyi.

India launched an important signal 1991, as India accepted the request by the junta to stop AIR Burmese Language Broadcasting, a popular daily radio program in Burmese which contested from India the government in Rangoon.

At the same time, India continued to provide shelter for Burmese political opponents fled from Myanmar and when Aung San Suu Kyi was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace in October 1991, it welcomed the event and expressed support to her democratic cause.

The ambivalence of Indian policy was evident in February 1992, when President Venkataraman received the credentials of the new Burmese ambassador in Delhi, while at the same time expressing concern about the delayed transition to a civilian government and calling for the restoration of freedom and the liberation of Aung San Suu Kyi.

The Burmese government showed interest in building new ties and the effects of India's move came out very soon as in August 1992 the two countries normalized their bilateral relations through the visit to Delhi of a delegation headed by U Aye, Minister of Foreign Affairs. The visit was returned in March 1993 by the Indian Foreign Secretary J. N. Dixit; however at that moment, while restoring a dialogue, India did not refrain from asking to the government the release of all political prisoners and expressing its enduring stance in favour of democracy in Burma.

In 1993 itself India conferred to the leader of the NLD the prestigious Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding.

In 1994 India and Burma signed the important India-Burma/Myanmar Trade Treaty, which inaugurated the cooperation in the commercial sector, whose relevance in the case of the two countries involved is not limited to the economic aspect, but also to the political, as the trade taking place across the Indo-Burmese border involves a number of illegal activity such as smuggling and drug trafficking. The building of closer and regular ties in the field of trade thus was seen by Delhi as a step towards reconciliation and wider cooperation. After 1994 numerous meeting between Burmese and Indian delegations took place in India and Myanmar until 1999, with an average yearly frequency, to further discuss aspects of such a partnership.

In the meantime, from the military point of view, Indo-Burmese cooperation had developed but continued to show enduring problems due to mutual suspicion. In July 2000, for example, the Indian Army Chief Ved Prakash Malik visited Burma[27], while at the same time General Khin Nyunt, head of Burmese Intelligence, was in paying a visit to Pakistan which is known to supply arms to Burmese generals and behind whom many Indian analysts identify the direction of China[28].

In 2000 Burmese troops fired on an Indian patrol along the Nagaland border, shooting to death three Indian soldiers, allegedly mistaken for Naga rebels[29].

In terms of support for Burmese democratization, while demonstrating availability or at least non-opposition towards Rangoon, India continued to offer shelter to hundreds of Burmese political refugees, though its policy of support stopped being unconditional and explicit as it used to be before. Some events occurred in the last decade prove this shift and give an idea of the ambiguity of nowadays Indian support for Burmese democracy. In September 1998, 64 Burmese activists were arrested while demonstrating against the official visit of a Rangoon general taking place in New Delhi; in December of the same year the Indian Home Ministry cancelled a conference organized by Burmese pro-democracy groups, moreover imposed to the refugees to register with the Foreign Regional Registration Office (FRRO) and ordered to the UNHCR Office in Delhi not to issue further refugee certificates to Burmese people; in February 1999, 50 Burmese activists were arrested while holding a demonstration against Rangoon; in July 1999 another democratic conference was cancelled by the Delhi government and visa applications were refused to those who aimed to join it; in July 1999 a Burmese activist broadcasting for Radio Free Asia from Moreh, border town in Manipur, was arrested[30].

When Aung San Suu Kyi was released for the second time from home detention in May 2002, the Indian government saluted the event in low tones, declaring at the same time trust in the democratic transition in which the junta had embarked.

When an international coalition led by the US condemned the junta following the so-called "Black Friday" incident of May 2003 and the consequent reiterated detention of Suu Kyi[31], India

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[27] M. Aung Myoe, *In the name of Pauk-Phaw. Myanmar's China Policy since 1948*, Singapore, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2011, p. 149.

[28] P. Nanda, *Rediscovering Asia: Evolution of India's Look East Policy*, New Delhi, Lancer Publishers & Distributors, 2003, p. 304.

[29] AFP, *Myanmar troops kill five Indian soldiers in border ambush*, in "Rediff", 26th October 2000, URL: http://www.rediff.com/news/2000/oct/26afp.htm.

[30] T. Thin Aung, S. Mynt, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

[31] D. M. Seekins, *Burma and U.S. Sactions: Punishing an Authoritarian Regime*, in "Asian Survey", 2005, Vol. 45, No. 3, pp. 437-452, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2005.45.3.437, p. 439.

assumed a neutral position, marking a stunning change when compared to the posture adopted against the military rule in occasion of the 8-8-88 movement. In opting out from the international boycott addressed against the generals India sided with Chin and the ASEAN countries; Delhi waited for these to drop their non-intervention policy and ask for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi.

India was also one of the countries which, as minority, voted against the decision of the International Labour Organization (ILO) to intervene in the country against the government of Rangoon due to the persistence of the phenomenon of forced labour.

Since events like these started taking place, the leader of the NDL Aung San Suu Kyi has expressed great disappointment. Though maintaining good relations with Delhi –she was given the 1993 Jawaharlal Nehru Prize in a ceremony held in 1995, and more recently, in 2012, she travelled to the Indian capital city to give the Jawaharlal Nehru Memorial Lecture[32]– she took advantage of numerous occasions to express her disapproval for India's closeness to the military junta and to call for a return to a pro-democracy Burma policy for India[33].

From the Indian side it is maintained that India continues to support a democratic development in Myanmar, though it does not do it openly as before, due to its official collaboration with the military regime.

IV.2. Indian interest in Myanmar

IV.2.1. Managing instability in the Northeast India

The Indian region of the Northeast consists of the states of Assam, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Arunchal Pradesh and Sikkim and is connected to the rest of India by a narrow corridor in Darjeeling District of West Bengal.

As a border region it has been historically characterized for political and cultural diversity. Under the British rule its heterogeneity was reinforced due to the diverse political organization existing in its different zones[34]: while the area in its whole was considered "tribal" and

[32] FP Staff, *Full Text: Suu Kyi on Nehru, Gandhi and India*, in "FirstPost.India", 15th November 2012, URL: http://www.firstpost.com/india/full-text-suu-kyi-on-nehru-gandhi-and-india-525111.html.

[33] R. Egreteau, *A passage to Burma? India, development, and democratization in Myanmar*, in "Contemporary Politics", 2001, Vol. 17, No. 4, p. 467; APF, *Suu Kyi urges India support for democracy in Myanmar*, in "Democracy Chronicles", 14th November 2012, URL: http://www.democracychronicles.com/suu-kyi-calls-for-india-support-for-myanmar-democracy/.

[34] VV.AA., *India-Myanmar Relations. Responses*…, cit., pp. 172-173.

administrated through a strict direct rule, at the same time existed in the territory numerous princely states[35]. Different regions underwent diverse evolution: while the hill areas remained more isolated, the valley suffered intensive migration. As a consequence, conflicts soon emerged due to disputes about resources partition.

Image 9. "Northeast India" (source: mapsofindia.com)

After the partition of India occurred in 1947, ethnic groups settled in the area where the border suddenly emerged were split on one side and the other of the frontier, phenomenon which had already occurred at the moment of the separation of British Burma from India in 1937. In the aftermath of the partition the political geography of the region appeared to have changed as follows: princely states of Tripura and Manipur joined India as federated states; Khasi was merged in Assam and Cooch Behar in West Bengal; Nepal preserved its autonomy; Bhutan and Sikkim became protectorates[36]. While following the artificial construction of the boundaries many ethnicities continued to live on both side of the borders ignoring their official delineation, the legacy of historical political independence soon came to the fore with the emergence of waves of separatist insurgency. In the aftermath of the partition, the Nagas declared separation from India in 1956 while insurgency broke up in Manipur and Assam respectively in 1964 and

[35] B. Lacina, *The Problem of Political Stability in Northeast India: Local Ethnic Autocracy and the Rule of Law*, in "Asian Survey", 2009, Vol. 49, No. 6, pp. 998-1020, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2009.49.6.998, p. 1001.
[36] Ibidem.

1966. Delhi central government dealt with the problem adopting violent and strict measure which made any possibility of pacific solution of the question fade away. Such a hard strategy not only created an unbridgeable gap between government and insurgency, but also concentrated the power over local affairs in the hand of the security forces at the expenses of the civilian institutions. Police and military forces remain still nowadays the only Indian bodies able to play a role in the confrontation with the rebels. Given their main role, these security forces are often conniving with local rebels: groups which are not strong enough to operate directly against the government through military campaigns find more effective to corrupt local authorities, obtaining support in the control of the local people, basically in terms of channelling of votes during elections, in change of bribes of different nature. The Indian local authorities, in their side, often prefer to "solve" the problem of local insurgency in such a way rather than through a direct clash with the rebels, and are inclined to show a blind eye to infraction of democracy and rule of law by these local "warlords" in change of relative stability and personal benefits[37].

The final consequence of such a situation in terms of pattern of violence occurring in the Northeast is that, differently from other Indian regions affected by anti-governmental separatist activity, in the Northeast violence is less frequently directed Indian security personnel while has its main targets in the civilians, who result to be tyrannized by the insurgency on one side and by the governmental central authorities on the other[38]. Such is the situation in the Indian Northeast.

The problem of the management of the insurgency in the region acquires further relevance in terms of bilateral relations between India and the countries lying on the other side of the Northeastern border. The Indo-Burmese border is one of these cases: as kinship are common across the border, the existence of ties between Northeastern and Burmese rebels is common. Northeastern insurgents when chased by governmental forces often cross the border where they keep camps, or keep operating from the Northern Burmese Hills.

It is well known that Burma, due to the unwillingness or inability of Rangoon to deal with the problem and to the high level of corruption analogously affecting the local Burmese authorities, has long been tolerant with such an irregular activity taking place in its territory and Delhi has explicitly expressed its disapproval for the support that has been given to it, in direct or indirect way, by the generals. In particular, Burma has reportedly offered shelter to some of the strongest

[37] B. Lacina, *op. cit.*, p. 999.
[38] Ivi, p. 1004.

anti-governmental ethnic groups such as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN)[39] and the ULFA (United Liberation Front of Asom)[40].

Due to the urgent necessity of dealing with the Northeastern instability emerged in Delhi in the 1990s, and aware of the fact that without Burmese cooperation no tangible improvement was going to be achieved, the government rediscovered the importance of opening a dialogue with the military regime. An Indo-Burmese partnership in the field would have brought positive results also in terms of abatement of the smuggling of drugs and especially arms which takes place across the border and which is closely linked to the rebels' activity[41].

Though the proposal of embarking in such a counterinsurgency partnership came from Delhi, also the Burmese government would have obtained its own benefits. The Burmese government indeed since independence has been affected by an enduring civil war; after the Communist threat faded away the main opponents continuing to oppose its authority have been the ethnic rebels. Thus, it is Burma's interest to counter the insurgents active in the border area; in this perspective, the partnership with India would help the government especially with respect to the Kachin Independent Army (KIA) and the Chin National Front (CNF), who own camps inside the Indian border and have reportedly built contacts with their Indian counterparts.

The existence of Burmese rebel activity on Indian soil, actually, was due to the collaboration of Delhi itself with the aforesaid groups: aware of the secret support given by Rangoon to Northeastern groups operating in the Burmese hills, in order to counteract, India built ties with these rebels during the 1980s[42]. India, for instance, trained the same Kachin rebels in order to use them as a buffer. Burma in turn, aware of the existence of such a collaboration as well as of the support India was giving to the pro-democracy front after 1988, decided to help more consistently rebels operating against Delhi such as the PLA and the ULFA.

The situation however changed completely as the Kachins and the generals signed a ceasefire in 1993, one among the numerous agreements negotiated with the rebels[43].

The visit to Burma by J. N. Dixit in 1993 laid the foundations of the partnership.

In 1995 the armed forces of the two countries took part to a join operation named "Operation golden bird" against Indian insurgents. However the *Tatmadaw*, after the Indian government announced that the leader of the NLD Aung San Suu Kyi had been awarded the Jawaharlal

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[39] R. Egreteau, *Instability at the gate: India's troubled Northeast and its external connections*, in "CSH Occasional Paper", 2006, No. 16, p. 30.
[40] Ivi, p. 49.
[41] VV.AA., *India-Myanmar Relations. Responses*…, cit., p. 166; R. Egreteau, *Instability at the gate*…, cit., p.76.
[42] R. Egreteau, *Instability at the gate.*.., cit., pp. 63-64.
[43] Ivi, p. 80.

Nehru Prize for Peace and Understanding, ordered the withdrawal of Burmese troops, determining the failure of the collaboration.

Joint operations were conducted against insurgents in 2000-2001; as a result of them, according to the *Tatmadaw*, five NSCN camps were destroyed.

The overall effectiveness of the counterinsurgency cooperation, however, proved to be inferior to Indian expectations.

IV.2.2. Opening up Indian economy to Southeast Asia

Vis a vis the rise of Southeast Asian economies, India started identifying Burma as a potential gateway to the ASEAN area. As a matter of fact Myanmar lies at the conjunction of South Asia with Indo China and moreover is the only ASEAN country (it was admitted in 1997) to share a border with the Indian subcontinent[44].

India's economic opening to Myanmar was actually coherent with the wider "Look East policy" adopted by Delhi since 1991 and aimed to increase Indian economic influence in the region[45].

The two most important partnerships resulted from such a policy are the "Bangladesh-India-Myanmar-Sri Lanka-Thailand Economic Cooperation" (BIMSTEC) and the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC)[46].

The first multilateral project was inaugurated in June 1997 when Myanmar was still not part of it; as the country joined ASEAN its participation in the forum appeared essential and the BISTEC developed in BIMSTEC in December 1997. The main aim of the partnership is to offer a platform for collaboration to the countries of South Asia and Indochina with a particular focus on infrastructural project. The most important BIMSTEC goal indeed is the Trans-Asia Highway[47], connecting India's Northeastern landlocked region with Thailand via Myanmar. The high interest shown by Delhi in the project and the implications of its success in the improvement of the Indo-Burmese economic ties are obvious.

MGC was inaugurated in 2000 by six countries: Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam, Laos –all states of the Mekong basin– plus India.

The two multilateral projects see the participation of the countries located at the strategic point between India and the area it wished to extend its influence; Myanmar plays a key role in such a

[44] VV.AA., *India-Myanmar Relations. Responses*…, cit., pp. 20-21.
[45] Ivi, pp. 17-18.
[46] Ivi, p. 28.
[47] Ivi, p. 174.

project; moreover China, the greatest competitor India has to face in terms of expansion in the Southeast, is not included as a partner.

The BIMSTEC and the MGC indeed, in India's view had also the function, besides pursuing more obvious economic goals, of creating a forum with the exclusion of Beijing which could work as an alternative to the Kunming Initiative, involving the BCIM countries (Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar). This is a regional forum promoted in 1999 by the government of the Southwestern Chinese province of Yunnan, relying on the full support of Beijing. Though India has a certain interest in the implementation of some projects proposed within the BCIM, such as the restoration of the ancient "Burma roads" linking India to China via Myanmar, however Delhi seems to prefer dealing with China through bilateral channels rather than multilateral and regional ones, such as the Kunming Initiative.

The participation to these multilateral projects was obviously welcomed by India and Myanmar, both of them willing to seek advantages from the partnership.

Burma, largely regarded as a pariah states for years, was obviously motivated by the perspective of improving its status within the family of the Asian nations, both politically and economically[48].

India in turn saw in the association the opportunity of balance institutionally the Chinese advent and take advantage of opportunities offered by the growing ASEAN markets.

With particular reference to Burma, India had different goals: to improve its bilateral trade relationship; to secure and enhance the trading routes connecting the landlocked and poor Northeast with Burma's main trading hubs; to step inside the new Burmese energy market, which after years of isolation and under-exploitation promised great earnings, being moreover proscribed to energetic companies of Western and like-minded countries who had chosen to sanction the military junta[49].

With reference to bilateral commerce, in 1994 the two countries signed the *Indo-Burmese border trade agreement* which in the next year created the first official cross-border exchange point in correspondence of the cities of Moreh in Manipur and Tamu in the Sagaing Division in Burma[50].

In addition to this, in 2001 the construction of the India-Myanmar friendship road was

[48] Ivi, p. 39.
[49] R. Egreteau, *A passage...*, cit., p. 475.
[50] R. Egreteau, *India's Ambitions in Burma: More Frustration than Success?*, in "Asian Survey", 2008, Vol. 48, No. 6, pp. 936-957, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2008.48.6.936, p. 942.

inaugurated: according to the project a road of 160 km length would have connected the town of Tamu, on the Indian border with Kalemyo and Kalewa, two Burmese trading centres[51].
Furthermore, India engaged in other infrastructural projects including railways and port facilities, especially in the Rakhine State, in the West of Burma. The choice of embarking in these plans was not casual, given the recent discovery in the region of a rich natural gas field[52]; wishing to exploit the combustible, India invested in the modernization of the deep-water port in Sittwe, capital city of Rakhine State, and laid the foundations for the construction of a pipeline aimed to transport the gas extracted directly to India via Bangladesh. Also in this case, however, Delhi had to face the concurrence of Beijing, equally hungry of energy supply and willing to gain access to the new Burmese market.

Image 10. "India's proposed Myanmar pipeline via Bangladesh" (source: "The Irrawaddy")

IV.2.3. Counter China's threat

Though the India was aware of the support given by the PRC to Indian Maoist insurgent groups during the 1960s and the 1970s and despite the fact the 1962 Sino-Indian War had left deep resentment and reciprocal distrust between the two contenders, however India did not perceive China as a strategic threat in Myanmar until the beginning of the 1990s.

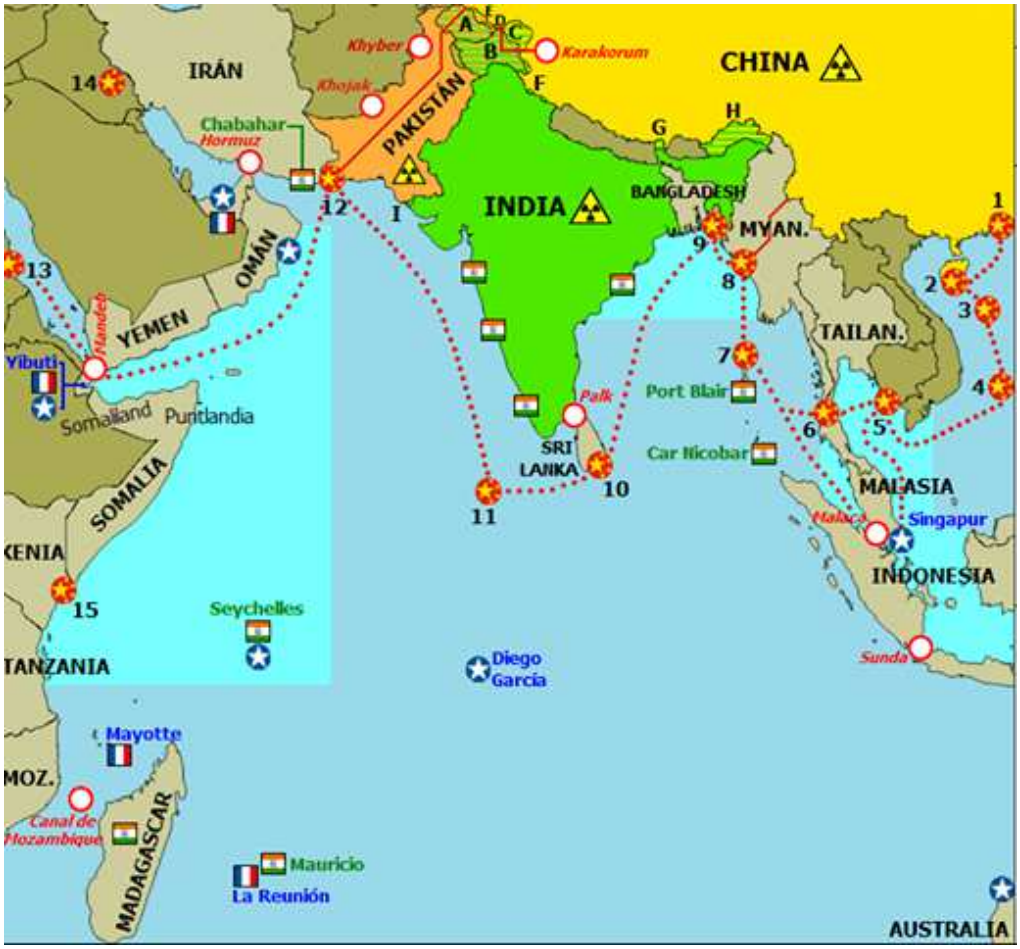
[51] H. K. Kang, *India and Myanmar. Looking East through a Strategic Bridge*, in "IPCS Issue Brief", 2010, No. 144, p. 1.
[52] VV.AA., *India-Myanmar Relations. Responses*…, cit., p. 27.

This was mainly due to the ambiguous posture of Rangoon towards Beijing and to the overall frustration of the PRC in fulfilling a full engagement of Burma.

Things changed at the end of the 1980s when the Chinese and the Burmese authoritarianism started moving one towards the other in search of reciprocal support vis a vis the international isolation surrounding them. On the Burmese front, China emerged more and more as the first, if not the only, ally Burma could rely on following the ostracism suffered by the regime as a consequence of the events occurred in 1988.

China in turn had demonstrated its interest towards an opening to Burma already in 1985, with the promotion of the "Opening the Southwest" policy. Such a posture, coherent with the new course of Chinese international relations inaugurated at the end of the previous decade with the "open door strategy" by Deng Xiaoping[53], aimed to create new ties between Rangoon and

Image 11. "Power competition in the IOR: India's "encirclement complex""
(source: www.wikipeida.org)



[53] R. Egreteau, *India's Ambitions in Burma: More Frustration*…, cit., p. 943.

Beijing in order to obtain two main results: to develop economically the Southwestern region, namely the less-advanced provinces of Yunnan and Sichuan[54]; secure a Chinese access to the Bay of Bengal, whose strategic importance could result crucial to the PRC in the event of a blockade of the Strait of Malacca, with all the consequences in terms of energy and national security which would derive from it.

The tangible consequence of these new reciprocal propensity were the Sino-Burmese arms deals concluded in 1989 and 1994, which provided Burma with an affordable modernization of the *Tatmadaw* on one hand, while "opening a door" to the PRC in the country.

Since then, India has started looking with increasing concern to the military collaboration developed by the two regimes; according to the String of Pearls (SOP) theory, which is rather successful among high military ranks in Delhi, such a collaboration could boost the process of encirclement China is implementing against the Indian subcontinent[55].

In this perspective, Myanmar appeared to be a crucial "battle-ground" in the geopolitical and geostrategic competition taking place between the two Asian giants in the IOR[56].

IV.3. Assessing India's Burma policy

IV.3.1. The evolution of India's Burma policy: reasons, interests, strategies

The evolution of India's posture towards Burma showed an evident U-turn at the beginning of the 1990s. The year symbol of the shift from explicit opposition to rapprochement with the Burmese military junta is the 1993, when Jyotindra Nath Dixit visited Burma in quality of Indian foreign secretary[57].

Within the pre-1993 phase it is possible to distinguish a first period, until 1988, characterized by a neutralist stance, and a second moment, starting with the 8-8-88 revolt, of "idealist"[58] support to the anti-governmental pro-democracy Burmese movement.

Generally speaking, it must be said that during the pre-1993 phase India did not recognize the importance of Burma; as in 1962 General Ne Win confirmed the neutralist position of the

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[54] R. Egreteau, L. Jagan, *Back to the old habits.*…, cit., p. 18.
[55] VV.AA., *India-Myanmar Relations. Responses*…, cit., pp. 29-31, 40.
[56] Ivi, p. 17.
[57] R. Egreteau, *India's Ambitions in Burma: More Frustration*…, cit., pp. 936-937.
[58] R. Mukherjee, D. M. Malone, *Indian foreign policy and contemporary security challenges*, in "International Affairs",
2011, Vol. 87, No. 1, p. 87-88.

country and cut the links with the neighbours, India entertained with the junta cordial and limited relations, without doing anything for improving them and lacking of any interest at this regard; the fact that Burma, following the coup of 1962, intensified its military and authoritarian characterization, represented on more reason not to have to deal with Rangoon.

The eastern Indian border, dividing the world's biggest democracy from the regime of the *Tatmadaw*, has for long time been neglected by Indian strategists, as the attention of the policy makers in Delhi was concentrated on the Western front, i.e. Pakistan.

The indifference towards the East plus the high concern towards the Western affairs made Delhi satisfied of the relations-non-relations it was maintaining with Rangoon.

However, the cruel repression of the 1988 demonstrations compelled India to rethink its Burma policy. In refocusing its posture towards Rangoon, India assumed hereafter an idealist stance: Indian commitment to the promotion of the Burmese democratization process appeared to be active and explicit, conducted as a humanist idealist policy in accordance to the Gandhian and Nehruvian principles at the basis of its own democratic republican identity.

The idealist support to democracy, second moment of the pre-1993 phase, declined at the beginning of the 1990s, vis a vis the ongoing reshaping of the regional geopolitics following the end of the Cold War. The Indian leadership realized that the changed international arena presented new challenges to India, and consequently reshaped its interests as well as the strategies to be adopted in order to fulfil them.

The new Indian set of interests can be summarized in three points: management of the ethnic insurgency of the Indian Northeast; opening Indian economy to ASEAN countries; countering the China threat.

In terms of strategy this implied the search of a new contact with Burma regardless of its political "colour", given that Burmese collaboration had been realized to be essential for the achievement of the aforesaid goals. Thus, the new concept lying beneath such a strategy was a rediscovery of Burma's potential as a variable of geopolitical balance of the region. Delhi as a consequence started regarding the question of Burmese democratization process, previously a target to be pursued in accordance to universalist values, as an issue more and more restricted to Burmese internal affairs: Burmese democratization lost its "internationalist" connotation and stopped being the balance of Indo-Burmese relations. India consequently abandoned its previous "style" of conducting its foreign policy: the "Eastern" affairs, for long time neglected in favour of the "Western" ones, gained new relevance; and so did the overall economic component within the foreign policy.

Along with the changed international situation, which can be regarded as an "external" factor in the determination of India's turnabout, internal factors also played a role. These internal factors, namely a change in the Indian leadership's priorities and values in the conduction of foreign affairs.

In Nehru's epoch India's foreign policy was balanced between regionalism and globalism, but after the change of leadership, globalism became relatively less important to the benefit of nationalism and regional interest. Indira Gandhi, was not able to assume the global role which had been belonged to his father; the last one to assume a distinctive international role was her son, Rajiv. The urgent domestic concern characteristic of the following governments necessarily influenced their interest towards international affairs, which resulted reduced. In addition to this, governments after 1989 were weak coalition governments, caring first of all about the stability of domestic politics rather than external affairs[59]. Another interesting point concerns the importance that, at the institutional level, foreign policy has within Indian institutions such as the Indian Parliament. It has been noted that although MPs possess great prerogatives in terms of foreign policy, however their main absorption remains focused on local interests related to their constituency of origin[60]. This made the Indian external intelligence organization (Research Analysis Wing (RAW)) come to the fore as a principal in the shaping of Indian foreign policy.

IV.3.2. Realist nature of India's regional support for democracy

The realism underlying contemporary India's Burma policy is no surprise if framed within the wider development of Indian foreign policy in the post-Cold War period, with particular reference to the support to the democratic evolution of neighbouring countries. The wider promotion of democratic institution in the area practiced by Delhi, in other words, made of India an international advocate of democracy in South Asia, but hides under idealistic declarations concrete "realistic" interests[61]. The strategies used by Delhi to promote the regional stability, besides its pro-democracy rhetoric, show that it diversified its policy towards South Asian non-democratic regimes depending on the occasion: with diverse neighbours India adopted a more categorical or flexible position in accordance to Indian national interests existing in that case and to what was considered the best way to pursue them.

[59] T. Thin Aung, S. Mynt, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
[60] Ibidem.
[61] R. Mukherjee, D. M. Malone, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

According to Cartwright[62] India's engagement in the promotion of democracy after years of traditional neutralism came to the fore after the end of the Cold war, as a regional and international strategy aimed to secure India's concern in the changing international scenario. A deeply "realist" support to democracy did not apply only to the Burmese case, but to a number of countries; out of them, the Burmese example is the one which more clearly proves such a realist posture in the regional and international promotion of national interests.

In Cartwright's analysis the international motivations determining Indian's rhetoric in support of democracy are three: the creation of a stable relation with the U.S., still global hegemonic power, in the short term; the solidification of India's role as middle power in the medium term; the promotion of India's role as future world power, in the long term[63].

In terms of regional strategy instead, India has been moved by the necessity of finding a way to deal with the political transformation occurring in South Asia in neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Bangladesh and Pakistan. Representing such an evolution both a challenge and an opportunity for India, Delhi aimed to secure stability during such a process; its manner of dealing with democratic promotion however was diversified based on the relevance of the interest that India held in the country in object and on the reciprocal sympathy existing between their set of interests.

The author distinguishes three broad patterns; the first one is characterized by an identification between India's democratic rhetoric and its real interests. When this pattern occurs India will actively promote democratization, fulfilling at the same time its official posture and its concrete intentions. An example is given by the interaction occurred between India and Afghanistan and Nepal[64]: India has intervened in the attempt to shape the political evolution of these countries in democratic sense, motivated by realistic interest, respectively in Pakistan and China.

The second pattern occurs in the case in which India does not have urgent interest in the countries undergoing democratic transformation; as a consequence the support in favour of democracy will occur but in lower tones: are this the cases of Bhutan and the Maldives, who received support from India, but without a strict bound in pro-democratic sense[65].

The third pattern occurs in the case of a strong divergence between India's pro-democracy rhetoric and its interest in the country considered. Burma represents the exemplification of such a pattern, which reveals the authentic realist "nature" of India's support for democracy, given the

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[62] J. Cartwright, *India's Regional and International Support for Democracy : Rhetoric or Reality?*, in "Asian Survey", 2009, Vol. 49, No. 3, pp. 403-428, URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2009.49.3.403.
[63] Ivi, pp. 422-427.
[64] Ivi, pp. 409-412.
[65] Ivi, pp. 412-413.

evident contrast between India's courting of the junta and its democratic identity. Delhi has demonstrated to be consistent with its declarations in practical terms only when such a coherence turned useful to its national interest[66]; thus, the case of Burma, though apparently deviant when compared to the other examples of democratic promotion at regional level, is to be regarded not as an exception but as the "litmus test" of the realism underlying India's pro-democracy stance in South Asia[67].

IV.3.3. The effectiveness of Indian realism

India has abandoned the previous idealist policy in favour of a realist one. Fernandes, one of the strongest supporters of Burmese activists fled to India in the golden age of India's crusade for Burmese democracy, has declared that India cannot do other thing than engaging the Burmese government, though it keeps giving help to its opponent in silent way.

This recent realist Burma policy however appears to be hesitant and unclear, with Delhi almost "ashamed" to build close ties with the military junta. It could happen perhaps that India, trying to maintain a sort of engagement on the two sides, will finally result to be unable to win the full trust both of the junta and of the Burmese population, losing both of them in the end. Also in terms of international position, India's hesitant posture is neither completely identifiable with the Western bloc nor with the ASEAN countries' one.

This introduces the problem of the *effectiveness* of India's realist Burma policy.

According to Egreteau's analysis of Sino-Burmese cooperation, India has not reached the objectives for which it embarked in the new policy and, as an overall result, has obtained "more frustration than success"[68]. Assessing India's Burma policy the author maintains that its performance is "mixed": negative with respect to the border issue and the bilateral trade but positive for the strategic interest; anyways, if seen as a whole, the general output is disappointing.

With respect to the first problem, i.e. the management of the insurgency in the Indian Northeast, a tangible cooperation between the two governments took place: following a number of meetings between the highest military authorities from both the sides, the *Tatmadaw* and the Indian Army started implementing a number of parallel attacks against rebel groups, especially Naga and NSCN-K. In 2002 India finally started selling arms: such a supply was supposed to be limited to

[66] Ivi, pp. 413-416.
[67] R. Mukherjee, D. M. Malone, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.
[68] R. Egreteau, *India's Ambitions in Burma: More Frustration*…, cit., p. 937.

counterinsurgency necessity but then expanded to include a wide range of weapons[69]. In 2004 General Than Shwe, while visiting Delhi, confirmed Burmese effort to collaborate with India in its fight to insurgency and later promoted a number of operations in Burma border territory relying on Indian equipment and intelligence[70].

Delhi, who had refused for long time to supply arms to the *Tatmadaw*, hoped such a move could serve to make the generals more sensitive to the Indian concern in the Northeast and also enhance their material ability to intervene on the matter[71]; however, the military collaboration with Burma, as predictable, caused great contestations from third countries, creating a first negative outcome accountable to the Indian realist policy.

Even in practical term the military partnership has not produced the expected results. The only positive outcome was the disruption of some centres of narco-trafficking activity and arms smuggling in diverse areas of the region concerned. Vis a vis such a downsized achievement, Assamese, Naga and Manipuri groups are still active in the Burmese Hills and Rangoon seems to be unable or unwilling to offer a more effective cooperation.

Beside the unreliability of the central government, it must be also considered that in this remote and poor region local authorities often choose to connive with criminals, gaining from bribes and smuggling a surplus income to improve their insufficient living standard. At the same time, India refrains from putting excessive pressure on Rangoon, fearing that, if irritated, the junta could make the border instability escalate. It could be even argued, at this regard, that Burma in consciously mismanaging the border partnership after having wisely used the issue in its negotiation with Delhi[72].

India got results which did not match its expectations also in the economic partnership. In terms of commerce, bilateral trade was stagnating or only slightly growing, never confirming the forecasts[73]. This was due to a number of obstacles existing in the field, which determined the ineffectiveness of the policies adopted and that, if not removed, will never allow a successful improvement of the trade relations between the two countries.

The first obstacle to a satisfactory development of bilateral trade is the lack of proper road infrastructure to connect India with Burmese main trade corridor[74]. From the Burmese side there is neither financial capability nor political intention of opening to an Indian region shook by

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[69] Ivi, p. 946.
[70] Ivi, p. 945.
[71] R. Egreteau, *Instability at the gate.…*, cit., p. 90.
[72] R. Egreteau, *India's Ambitions in Burma: More Frustration*…, cit., p. 948.
[73] VV.AA., *India-Myanmar Relations. Responses*…, cit., p. 39.
[74] R. Egreteau, *A passage...*, cit., pp. 472-474.

instability, so that the Chinese connections have been preferred, like in the case of the Tamu-Kalewa-Mandalay road, whose construction was never accomplished by Rangoon[75].

Another main de-motivator for those willing to start business in Burma is the instability of its banking system and of its economic system in general.

In terms of marketing, moreover, Indian products are often overtaken by cheap goods proceeding from the PRC and Thailand, fact which has canalized the majority of Indian investment towards state-sponsored projects[76].

Table 1 - "India-Myanmar bilateral trade (US$ million)"
Source: Indian Ministry of External Affairs (www.mea.gov.in)

Year	**India's Export**	**India's Import**	**Total**	**Trade Balance**
2006-2007	139.95	781.93	921.19	(-) 641.98
2007-2008	185.43	809.94	995.37	(-) 624.51
2008-2009	221.64	928.97	1150.61	(-) 707.33
2009-2010	207.97	1289.8	1497.77	(-) 1081.83
2010-2011	194.75	876.13	1070.88	(-) 681.38
2011-2012	217.65	763.32	814.6	(-) 545.67

In terms of energy projects, India has succumbed to China. The greatest disappointment was represented by the failure of the negotiations for the exploitation of a gas field located in Arakan, being India interested not only in the massive acquisition of the extractions but also in the construction of a pipeline to pump the gas to India via Bangladesh. However, complications in the negotiations with the last one and the appeal of better conditions proposed to Naypidaw by Beijing made Burma drop off the offer of Delhi[77].

Strangely, it could be argued that India's most successful aspect of its realistic Burma policy has been the collaboration in the strategic field; this third type of partnership aimed to "use" the new access to Myanmar in order to counter China, perceived as threateningly expanding its influence on the country and in the wider IOR. Such a conclusion is based on the fact that India obtained from the military cooperation with Burma a number of results, namely: the right to use Burmese ports as docking and refuelling points, implement joint naval operations and share intelligence

[75] R. Egreteau, *India's Ambitions in Burma: More Frustration*…, cit., p. 948.
[76] Ibidem 949; VV.AA., *India-Myanmar Relations. Responses.*…, cit., pp. 39-40.
[77] VV.AA., *India-Myanmar Relations. Responses*…, cit., pp. 165-166.

about Chinese military presence in the zone. On the other hand, it could be argued that at the basis of the reassurance which India sought to obtain through such a partnership, there was, rather than a successful containment of Chinese influence, the fact that the "Chinese threat" India thought to perceive was not as plausible as some military circles in Delhi, victim of a "encirclement complex", maintained.

In any case, being or not effective, it is likely that India will choose to continue in its realist Burma policy, at least in the short term, at least as long as the PRC, despite all the dilemmas which in turn affect Chinese relations with Rangoon, will somehow remain the junta's closest ally.

IV.3.4. Future perspectives of India's Burma policy: realism or support to Burmese democratization?

Based on the previous analysis, an overall evaluation of the perspectives of India's pro- and anti-democratic Burma policy will follow. Rather than a forecast, it will be an attempt to draw an evaluation of the plausibleness of the endurance of both the "idealist" pro-democracy policy and the "realist" pro-junta one: what are the obstacles for India in the prosecution of the already declined support to the Burmese democratization process? What are the impediments for a reinforcement of the "realist" approach to the military government?

A way to make the Indian support to Burmese democratization more effective could be first of all seeking a rapprochement between the Indian policy makers and the leadership of the democratic movement[78].

In this regard, some note that many Indian leaders perceive the Burmese democratic movement as highly influenced by the West, rather than to Asian countries, in terms of philosophy, interest and power. In addition to this, Indian NGOs and politicians involved in the activity of support to Burmese democratic cause have declared that the NLD rarely keeps a dialogue with them, and that their main Burmese interlocutors are not the leaders of the regular movement, but student groups exiled in India[79]. This lack of coordination is influential in the effectiveness of the support that still emanates from India: though many people are still supportive to the democratic movement (even though along the border the reception of the refugees is less and less welcomed

[78] Ivi, pp. 21-23.
[79] T. Thin Aung, S. Mynt, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

by Indian inhabitants) this sympathy was not transformed in a consistent backing to democratic campaign in Burma or India[80].

Though, as mentioned, the perseverance in this realistic posture is the option that India will most probably adopt at least in the short terms, pro-democracy supporters shall try to influence India's policy demonstrating in which way the establishment of democracy in Rangoon can be useful to Indian interests, relying on the "hesitant" nature of Delhi's approach to the generals and taking advantage of the partial failure of Indo-Burmese cooperation in terms of border management and trade partnerships[81].

Also with reference to the realist policy of collaboration with the generals of the *Tatmadaw*, which is probably the direction which India will continue to follow, there are some vulnerabilities which prevent such a policy from being more aggressive and effective.

The first one is the fact that India faces competition with the economic and political influence that China has affirmed and keeps on promoting in Myanmar. Though weakened by various complications, Chinese Burma policy is the main adversary for India in the effort of gaining trust and favour from the generals[82].

A second obstacle is represented by the low availability that the Burmese demonstrate towards foreigners willing to play a role in the politics and the economics of their country. This is particularly true in the case of Indians, victims of an "Indophobia" which dates back to the times of the British rule. Within Burma's mainstream political culture, characterized by xenophobia and nationalism, people generally maintain an adverse consideration of Indians[83].

The geography of the area linking the two states represents another hardship, as its perpetuates the problem of the managing of the insurgency along the border and, due to its infrastructural deficiencies, contributes also to restrict the full development of bilateral trade relations.

These are the main challenges that India still has to face in order to obtain more tangible results in Myanmar. To conclude, it could be advisable that, if willing to pursue a more aggressive and effectual promotion of Indian interest, Delhi shall solve the divisions existing within India itself with regard to the acceptability of a closer relation with the Burmese authoritarianism[84].

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[80] Ibidem.
[81] Ivi, p. 112.
[82] H. K. Kang, *op. cit.*, p. 3.
[83] R. Egreteau, *It Takes Two to Tango: The Delicate Dance between India and Burma*, in "Asia Pacific Bulletin", 2010, No. 66.
[84] R. Egreteau, *A passage...*, cit., pp. 479-480 ; R. Egreteau, L. Jagan, *Back to the old habits…*, cit., pp. 96-98.

Conclusions

The case of the Sino-Indian interaction with Burmese politics challenged the appearances and showed that, in reality, "it is not as it seems": neither Sino-Burmese relations were as idyllic as the communal authoritarian nature of the states suggested, nor India was the incorruptible advocate of Burmese democracy as one could suppose at first glance.

Thus, the first conclusion that can be deduced by the previous analyses is that both Chinese and Indian relation with the Burmese authoritarianism has been not constant but changing during the time. In the case of China the trend has been fluctuating, with a continuous oscillation between reciprocal compliance and mutual criticism.

The second evidence is given by the fact that the reciprocal convergence between Beijing and Rangoon was due, for both the parties, to merely realist reasons: aspirations induced by Chinese hegemonic goals, on one hand, and state of necessity caused by Burmese isolation, on the other.

Mismatches were due, on the Burmese side, by the resistance to the Chinese embrace practiced by the junta –in this instance faithful heir of the neutralist and isolationist position of the former civilian government. On the Chinese side in turn, both Burmese reluctance to surrender and upheavals in domestic and international politics of the PRC were causes of recurrent disturbances.

On the Indo-Burmese front, instead, the changing trend of the bilateral relations between the world's biggest democracy and the *Tatmadaw* appeared to be, rather than fluctuant, parabolic: a constant pro-democratic trend, increasing in correspondence of 1988, followed by a sudden turnabout, and a consequent growth in the opposite direction.

Also in this case, the divergence/convergence between Delhi and Rangoon was motivated by realist interests; in particular, Rangoon was not reluctant to receive Indian "advances" as they could have been useful via-à-vis its enduring economic and political isolation. With regard to India, the centrality of realist interests in the shaping of an Indian Burma policy is evident if we consider that, as long as urgent interests were not identified, India ignored Burmese relevance and did not shape any proper strategy with respect to Rangoon. The first long pro-democratic phase was the product of such a "negligence". As India woke up and realist interests came to the

fore, Delhi realistically sacrificed its democratic idealism to fulfil them; or, better said, to try to fulfil them.

At this regard the third remark is that, despite their underlying realism, both the Burma policies failed in their expectations due to Rangoon's uncertain and unclear moves. Burma never trusted and always feared China, and struggled not to make its neutralism excessively "leaning" towards Beijing. At the same time, it mistrusted India, suspicious because of colonial legacies and hesitant due to the worries that it could disappoint or provoke the PRC. Burma, despite the "absurdity" which often characterized its conduction of domestic and external politics, by practicing an ambiguous and indolent foreign policy finally outwitted both the giants.

This does not mean that the pro-democracy or pro-generals support acted by Delhi and/or Rangoon was completely ineffective.

Should one wonder whether China's help to the *Tatmadaw* affected Burmese democratization, the answer would be that it undoubtedly had a chief role in allowing the regime to survive to its hardest hours; Chinese support to the anti-democratic government, in other words, was fundamental for its perpetuation and enforcement, especially from a military point of view. As a consequence, it should be also considered that Chinese action, empowering the reactionary rule, equally represented an obstacle for the democratic one struggling for emancipation. In sum, it must be concluded that from a Burmese point of view, Beijing worked against the Burmese democratization process by backing the junta with political and material support, though this support did not produce, from a Chinese perspective, the full identification *Tatmadaw*-CCP that the PRC was seeking to obtain. Burma did not become a client-state of China during the Cold War and continuously counterbalanced Chinese influence in terms of both foreign policy and foreign economic/military aid till recent days, never letting Beijing become determinant in the policy-making process taking place in Rangoon and later in Naypidaw.

To India, on the other hand, it must be recognized that the "idealist" policy it initially adopted provided the Burmese front for democracy with precious help in terms of funding, management of emergencies following clashes with the *Tatmadaw* and, more importantly, political support: repeated accusations and calls for democracy from Delhi contributed to the international awareness with regard to the Burmese problem, giving public resonance to the "Fighting Peacock" and making the generals' regime a *pariah* state.

Delhi support to Burmese democratization has not been decisive as long as the movement remained a minority force, but undoubtedly represented an important source of aid and political ally for it, as proved by Aung San Suu Kyi's complaints following India's realist U-turn.

Similarly, India's new policy of wooing the generals was highly useful to the regime; of course it was not decisive in the survival of the junta –as India's approach was somewhat silent and hesitant– but the government made wise use of it: to diversify the sources of economic aid and arms supply against an overwhelming Chinese influence and, together with the ASEAN accessibility, to open a door to regional and international rehabilitation from that status of *pariah* that India itself contributed to build earlier.

These are the lessons learned in terms of positive/negative influence of China and India on Burmese democratization process: the Peacock is still fighting, while the Elephant and the Dragon have been somewhat outsmarted by the junta. The junta –despite being an obtuse and retrograde ruler and an unpredictable international actor– seemed to have been able to play the best cards: in term of domestic politics it successfully resisted the legitimate power transfer in favour of the NLD, while in terms of external politics it made the two giants court it, obtaining and promising a lot but finally giving little.

These consequences on the development of democracy/enforcement of military rule, however, have a feedback on the same actors who caused them. This is due to the fact that the perpetuation of the Burmese junta in power has got both a domestic and an external relevance; in terms of internal affairs it means that, obviously, the Burmese people continue to face an incompetent and repressive regime, cause of economic stagnation and human rights violations. In addition to this, in terms of external affairs, the continuation of the military rule implies that Myanmar remains a backward nation and that states who are interested in it have no other choice than dealing with a partner –the junta– who is inefficient and irresponsible. Although Chinese and Indian realism is indifferent to the first type of consequences (the domestic relevance of democracy, the promotion of democracy *tout-court*), however they do are concerned about the second one, which directly touches the national interests that they have in Myanmar. As a consequence, also the domestic issue becomes relevant, as it is the direct cause of the second: dealing with a non democratic Burma means making business with an unstable underdeveloped economy controlled by an unreliable government. Also realist self-interested stake-holders like China and India had to recognize that in Burma the political and economical development are closely linked to each other and that, though not relevant *per se*, democracy can indirectly become a goal for a more effective fulfilment of national interests.

This could probably influence the resetting of the Chinese and Indian interests in Myanmar and, consequently, the Burma policy of the two countries.

It is not possible to say that in the short term the favourable approach Beijing and Delhi had towards Naypidaw will drastically change in anti-junta and pro-democracy sense. This is a less plausible hypothesis due to the ongoing strategic competition which is taking place in the greater Asia-Pacific between the two. Myanmar is a central battleground for India and China, with Beijing trying to gain momentum in the IOR and Delhi counterbalancing such an expansion. Both the contenders feel they cannot lower the guard, risking the other will checkmate and win the Burmese game.

However, the urgency of Indian and Chinese interests in Myanmar vis-à-vis the overall failure of their partnerships with the Burmese junta suggest that probably both the Elephant and the Dragon will start looking at the Peacock's fight with different eyes very soon.

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